



EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION

1994–2019



ACTS OF DE-FACTO SOLIDARITY

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FOREWORD

From its conception, Europe has been built through what Robert Schuman called “acts of de-facto solidarity”. In recent months, this principle has been tested as never before. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced an unprecedented response from governments and required huge sacrifices from citizens in support of the common good.

In these uncharted waters, the European Union has stepped up to the challenge. Despite difficult moments, a response based on solidarity and cooperation is emerging, one that could give new life to our Union.

While the Union has strengthened its internal solidarity, it has remained committed to its global partners – in particular in the Western Balkans, the EU’s wider neighbourhood, and Sub-Saharan Africa – to help overcome this crisis, in cooperation with partners such as the United Nations.

The European Training Foundation’s (ETF) 25th anniversary is a timely reminder that the EU has faced challenges before and has emerged stronger every time. Whether in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall or the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Balkan conflicts, or dealing with the profound economic disparities in the Mediterranean region, the European Union works beyond its borders to support peace and prosperity. We recognise that our wellbeing goes hand-in-hand with that of our neighbours.

People have always been at the centre of our approach. This is where the ETF comes in. Developing human potential lies at the heart of the mission of this unique organisation. Knowledge and skills empower people to adapt to change and overcome challenges. They give opportunities for people to find

or create employment and forge a decent life for themselves and their families. They foster social inclusion and build citizenship. For 25 years, the ETF has been the EU’s ambassador promoting this agenda in the countries of the wider neighbourhood, supporting them in developing their education and training systems to promote employability, growth, and inclusion.

Looking to the future, and to a recovery that will be based on the green economy, sustainability, and the digital transition, skills are more important than ever in the European Union and beyond.

Our enhanced support for the EU’s neighbours in the years to come will mean a more vital role for the ETF as a catalyst for change and a resource for the European Union in targeting assistance to make the most of human potential in our partner countries.

I thank the ETF for its 25 years of action, and wish it every success in future, building on its achievements and flying the flag for a European Union that puts people first.

David Sassoli,
President of the European Parliament

25

YEARS SUPPORTING COUNTRIES TO DEVELOP THROUGH LEARNING

The objective of the European Training Foundation is 'to contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies, to improving human capital development by supporting countries to create lifelong learning systems' (EC 1339/2008).

In the 25 years since its establishment, new words have regularly been weighed to rephrase and reframe this objective, but the core message has not changed. This is powerful testimony that the ETF responds to a need that is as urgent as ever.

The EU was born out of a desire to turn the energy spent on centuries of war towards peace and prosperity. It was built on the belief that the best way to achieve this is by helping citizens to maximise their potential.

It is in the interests of EU citizens not only to live in peace and prosperity themselves, but also to live in a peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood. This is where the ETF comes in, because this requires also maximising the potential of people in the countries that surround us.

For people in many of the EU's neighbouring countries, being encouraged to maximise their potential had been a distant dream for much of the 20th century. Some came out of deep poverty, others out of colonial repression, others again had suffered under exhausting wars or political ideologies that did not hold the power of individual potential for the common good in the same regard as we do today.

Their histories were very different, but in the age of globalisation, their targets became ever more convergent and their lives interdependent.

Today, most countries surrounding the EU share goods markets, financial markets and increasingly skills and labour markets. To thrive, just like any modern economy, they need skills that are constantly honed to the latest requirements of the workplace and skills to foster citizenship and social inclusion.

The EU helps its neighbours perfect their policies for continuing skills development. That is the task of the European Training Foundation and that's what it has the European Training Foundation for.

08

INTRODUCTION

10

**SUPPORTING EU
EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE**

16

**SUPPORT FOR EU
ENLARGEMENT**

20

**FROM COUNTRY
EXPERT TO
GLOBAL ACTOR**

32

**POLICY ADVICE
AND SUPPORT**

38

**KEEPING A FINGER
ON THE PULSE**

42

**AN APPRECIATING
STOCK OF EXPERTISE**

46

**TOWARDS A GLOBAL
KNOWLEDGE HUB**

52

**THE NEXT DECADE
FOR THE ETF**

56

LOOKING AHEAD

THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION



INTRODUCTION

THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION DOES NOT TRAIN OR QUALIFY PEOPLE. IT HELPS COUNTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS TO TRAIN AND QUALIFY PEOPLE. AS SUCH, IT IS HARD TO QUANTIFY THE IMPACT OF THE ETF IN NUMBERS OF BENEFICIARIES OR ECONOMIC ADDED VALUE.

It is, however, quite feasible to qualify the impact of the ETF, because it has affected the lives and work of many people, within the EU and outside it.

We asked 15 of these people to tell us how they had experienced the work of the ETF during different periods of the last 25 years. Some of them had used or promoted the services of the ETF in Brussels. Some had tapped or transferred ETF expertise in the partner countries. Others had worked with the ETF as peers. Some had even held a combination of positions that allowed them to peek into the engine-room from different perspectives.

This is their personal testimony.

It is not a chronological narrative of the history of the ETF. We published two of these earlier and they are still very much worth reading and therefore also not very much worth repeating.

It is a personal – and therefore necessarily subjective – account of the way in which the ETF has helped to shape learning and training in the neighbourhood.

SUPPORTING EU EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

THE ETF EMERGED FROM THE RUBBLE OF THE IRON CURTAIN AND THE BERLIN WALL. THE BLUEPRINT WAS ALREADY ON THE DRAWING BOARD IN THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE WILDFIRE REVOLUTIONS THAT SAW THE COMMUNIST REGIMES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE FALL LIKE DOMINOES BETWEEN 1989 AND 1992.

The plan to establish a European Training Foundation was originally part of a two-pronged European strategy to support people development in the hectic transition period. Money was earmarked in the fund for the Phare Programme¹.

Support to higher education materialised in 1990 as the Tempus Programme, which got off the ground in Poland and Hungary with unprecedented speed. But Tempus was a programme and the ETF was going to be an agency, so the launch of the ETF got caught up in the decentralisation process that was underway to bring the EU closer to the citizens it serves.

One of the reasons that the EU agencies came off to a slow start, was that there was a great deal of disagreement on how they would be assigned to different Member States. As to the role of the ETF, some saw it as an administrative extension of the Commission services in Brussels. Others rather wanted it to become a semi-independent specialist agency that the Commission services could draw upon. It would take a whole decade for the ETF to finally get a clear mandate to become the latter.

A TWO-PRONGED EUROPEAN STRATEGY TO SUPPORT PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

¹ Phare is the French word for Lighthouse. The abbreviation PHARE stood for Pologne-Hongrie: assistance à la restructuration des économies, which thankfully worked in English too. Phare was the programme devised in 1989 to support the transition process in Poland and Hungary. Other transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe were included in the years that followed. In 1997, Phare became the main instrument for the implementation of the EU's pre-accession strategy.

Steve Sadler came to the ETF in 1995 to work on Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Via many detours, he ended up collaborating with the ETF again, today as team leader responsible for Eastern Partnership² coordination at the Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). He says the difference between 1995 and 2020 is night and day.

“The ETF is a face of the EU in the eastern European countries that I work with,” he says. “When I worked in Torino, that was not the case, to say the least. The ETF was not a centre of expertise. We managed projects and cleared EU expertise. The ETF was a centre of people who knew the people who knew. Today, they are people who know.”

THE ETF IS A FACE OF THE EU IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

²The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is the EU initiative that governs its relationship with the post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The EaP aims to be an avenue for discussions of trade, economic strategy, travel agreements, and other issues between the EU and its eastern European neighbours. More broadly, it promotes a common neighbourhood of shared democracy, prosperity, stability, and increased cooperation.

IT HAS BECOME A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

This is also very clearly the impression of **Lluís Prats**, who oversees the work of the ETF from the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in Brussels and who coordinates the input to the ETF of all other Commission services through a process called the structured dialogue, which ensures that the political priorities of the European Union are reflected in the ETF's actions.

“The expertise and activities of the ETF are essential to the activities of the Union,” he says.

“The ETF has proven to be an enormous value-added. As the responsibilities of the European Commission increased, but not the number of staff, we lost specific

expertise. We became an administration of generalists that require the input of others. The beauty of the ETF is that since its inception 25 years ago, it has become a source of knowledge. This is precious for this administration because people like us, we don't know anymore.”

“The ETF, meanwhile, went the other way. Even when it still administered projects for the European Commission in the late 1990s, it began acquiring a deep understanding of the internal structures of its first partner countries and the required strategies they need to develop effective education and training systems.”

“Of course, in a perfect world, the Commission should have dozens of

agencies like that. We only have one and we take advantage of it. They are the knowledge centre within the administration in their specific field of expertise.”

“Just as an example, when we visit the ministry in Montenegro to discuss necessary education and training reforms, we are met with respect. They take the reforms seriously and they listen to us because we know. And we know because the ETF knows. We know the issues, who are the actors and what needs to be done because the ETF has developed such excellent working relationships. This is totally precious for us.”

THE LINKS BETWEEN

SKILLS & ECONOMY

Lawrence Meredith has also seen the work of the ETF from very different perspectives. Today, he is Director for Neighbourhood East at DG NEAR, but from 1997 to 2000, he was the desk officer responsible for the work programme of the ETF at 'DG XXII'. DG XXII was what the Directorate-General for Education and Culture was called in those days.

"Back then, we had to lobby with the external relations people for money for the agency and for making use of their services. Now I am one the directors using it," he says.

"The ETF was part of the second wave of agencies and in many ways the first serious wave of agencies. The level of discussions was: what are these people going to do? There was a

small operational budget of EUR 3 million, but the main expense was staff and hardware, so the natural response from elsewhere in Brussels was to let the agency staff manage programmes."

Today, the situation could hardly be more different.

"Our counterparts in eastern Europe hold the ETF in very high regard. The ETF is an established actor. After all, 25 years is a career for most of us! It has become part of the EU programming cycle in an established area: the links between skills and the economy – future-proofing the labour market. And human capital is an issue that has climbed so much higher up the political agenda than where it was 25 years ago."

THE ETF ALSO ACQUIRES A SERIES OF SNAPSHOTS OF THE STATE OF PLAY

Jeroen Willems spent several years at the European Delegation in Baku, Azerbaijan, as Head of Cooperation, overseeing the EU assistance portfolio in a strategically important partner country. He is now back in Brussels, also at DG NEAR, still working with the Eastern Partnership. As such, he has first-hand experience of working with the ETF in different scenarios.

"The great advantage of working with the ETF is that it is an EU institution," Willems says.

"It doesn't survive on projects in the traditional sense of the word. ETF activity is usually of a longer duration than the typical project cycle, so ETF experts can build up a network of key contacts and visit frequently to have discussions with key counterparts. The ETF also acquires a series of snapshots of the state of play in the countries it works with. And not least, the ETF can help the delegations with projects that sometimes don't go 100% in the right direction. Because of its profound expertise, the ETF can help with the formulation of new programmes and projects in line with broader objectives and the broader economic diversification agenda."

"For me the ETF has always been a key partner and a very flexible one. When we, as delegations, had a need for authorities to better understand what issues are at stake, the ETF was always swift to react, helping us to propose solid programmes and interesting

presentations. This could help us to sway policy development in the right direction. ETF involvement could also make a big difference when ministries all worked in their separate vertical pillars and would not sit around the same table to talk, for example, about labour market information systems, which is an area that does not just concern the ministry of labour. The ETF had convincing power by virtue of its ready access to international expertise and good practice from all over Europe."

Another of the Eastern Partnership countries is Georgia, where the Ministry of Education, Sciences, Culture and Sports started a profound overhaul of vocational education and training (VET) in 2013. **Irina Tserodze** is the head of the Georgian ministry's Vocational Education Department. Her account matches that of Jeroen Willems.

"EU partners helped us a lot with successfully completing the first round of the reforms in Georgia," she says.

"In these last five or six years of fundamental transformation, the ETF has helped us to identify best practice from the EU and as such has been the first organisation to familiarise us with many of the innovations that we introduced."

"They inspired us but did not just give us one-off recommendations. They were with us all the way while we piloted, introduced, implemented and assessed."

SUPPORT FOR EU ENLARGEMENT

ALTHOUGH A 'EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE' WAS FORMALLY ESTABLISHED IN 1990⁵, IT TOOK UNTIL 1995 FOR THE ETF TO GET OFF THE GROUND IN TURIN.

By that time, the Soviet Union had disintegrated into 15 independent countries, the European Economic Community had become the European Union, and association agreements had already been signed with Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and the newly divorced Czech Republic and Slovakia. These were years of profound geopolitical change.

From the outset, therefore, a considerable part of the work of the ETF

would be to prepare the ever-growing list of candidate countries for meeting the EU accession requirements.

Indeed, the EU support programme for accession countries, Phare, changed tack in 1997 to henceforth work only on issues that still needed attention in each country in the run-up to accession.

Initially, ETF support to accession was a bit of an uphill struggle because general education was not part of what became known as the *acquis communautaire* – the collection of rules and regulations that countries had to adopt to be ready for EU accession. Vocational training, on the other hand, was but only to some extent. On the whole, education policy was sensitive stuff and remained a matter of national sovereignty in the individual Member States.

The Lisbon Strategy profoundly changed that³. At the Lisbon Council of 2000, the European heads of state agreed on a far more structural role for education and training in the economic development of the EU.

“Only after the Lisbon Council was vocational education and training development moved to the position it really deserves on European policy agendas,” said the late **Peter de Rooij** towards the end of his tenure as the ETF director in 2004.

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

This preparation would become one of the cornerstones of the work of the ETF in the following decade because it would require two kinds of expertise, the combination of which was quite unique.

In order to assist countries in preparing for EU membership, the ETF had to plot the state of play in each country very precisely: where did it come from, what had been achieved, which other international organisations were doing what on the ground and, very importantly, what was the potential. It may seem odd today, but this was very often information that newly elected governments had no access to themselves. Gathering education, training and labour market information – and developing capacity with national authorities to gather their own information – was one of the core activities in the first years. At the same time, the ETF was the EU’s messenger, such as through the large special preparatory programme for participation

in the European Social Fund (SPP-ESF) which would become one of the ETF’s most important contributions to the accession process in the first wave of candidate countries. The ESF-SPP project set up national training institutes in each of the countries and provided for the instruction of some 3,000 staff at NGOs and national, regional and local authorities.

But explaining what was expected of candidate countries in areas related to human capital development was a moving target, with some very important EU developments gaining momentum in the first decade of the ETF’s existence – most notably the Copenhagen Process that was launched in 2002.

This combination of expertise that had been developed in Turin since 1995 not only helped the first candidate countries move towards accession but also kickstarted reform processes in many other partner countries. They could borrow and adapt blueprints from European countries that had faced very similar challenges and avoid having to reinvent many a wheel. Even today, this experience is used across the entire European neighbourhood region, as new countries prepare for accession or closer association with the EU.

³ The blueprint for EU support to vocational education and training reform in Central and Eastern Europe was made at the Task Force for Human Resources in 1989. The Task Force was the predecessor of DG XXII of the European Commission, known today as the DG for Education and Culture.

STEPPING UP EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

GEOSTRATEGIC INVESTMENT

IN A STABLE, STRONG AND UNITED EUROPE

Marko Vukašinić oversees international cooperation and European integration at the education ministry of Montenegro. He has worked with the ETF during all of his 17 years at the ministry, starting before Montenegro and Serbia went their separate ways in 2006. He remembers that much of the work they did all those years ago was so new that it could barely be thought of as preparation for accession, even though it was called pre-accession support.

“We did a lot of IPA⁴ planning initially, first with Anastasia Fetsi, who is now head of operations at the ETF, and later with ETF expert Anthony Gribben. It was all new to us. One programme was related to developing a national qualifications framework. Seven years later we did the referencing. It always started with why it was important. The ETF was good at this: listening to us but also convincing us with arguments, not pushing us. Most of all, showing us the bigger picture.”

“Over the years, we carried out many projects with international partners. Some came with experts. Others came with so-called experts. But the ETF always had this extraordinary level of credibility. Whoever was here representing the ETF, we never had to doubt their expertise.”

Safet Gerxhaliiu, from Kosovo, is the co-founder and current secretary-general of the Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum, a joint initiative of chambers of commerce and industry from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

“I believe that working towards EU membership for countries in the Western Balkans is a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe,” says Gerxhaliiu.

“Accession should be merit-based and we’re not quite there yet, but very good progress is being made throughout the Western Balkans. As a man that is on the road 365 days of the year, I am in constant contact with companies and institutions in our region, and in its progress, I can recognise the footprint of the ETF almost everywhere.”

“It is true that despite good economic recovery in the region, the labour market situation remains challenging, with a slow pace of job creation and unemployment remaining high, particularly among young people and women. We desperately need educational policies that respond to the demands of inclusive economies in the region. One of those key demands is cooperation between vocational education, training and the private sector. This is directly included in the ETF programmes.”

During the years of cooperation with the ETF, Gerxhaliiu has the impression that the work has become more complex but less rigid.

“Compared to the past, the ETF is more open to new ideas from our part. That will benefit impact.”

Indeed, one of the great lessons learned in Turin over the past 25 years has been that listening often has a higher teaching potential than doing all the talking. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

PREPARING FOR EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS

In September 1998, the European Commission invited the ETF to manage the Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund (SPP-ESF). With a budget of EUR 2.1 million, the project formed part of the EUR 60 million Phare package designed to help the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe to build an adequate institutional structure to cope with the laws and regulations of the EU and, in particular, to prepare for access to the EU structural funds.

THE PROGRAMME BECAME ONE OF THE ETF’S KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ACCESSION PROCESS IN THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES.

The project helped the accession countries in the first rounds of enlargement to prepare for access to the huge potential of the European structural funds. It set up national training institutes in each of the countries and provided for the instruction of some 3,000 staff at NGOs and national, regional and local authorities.

The programme was carried out in three stages.

Phase I comprised introductory seminars and study visits. Phase II comprised national seminars organised in each of the candidate countries. These seminars addressed 30 to 40 key officials, providing them with in-depth, technical information on the policy framework of the ESF and its administrative demands. They were followed by national seminars which addressed a much wider audience, including employers, training institutions and social partners. Finally, in Phase III of the programme, local seminars were organised in several ‘priority’ regions of the candidate countries.

The programme also became a stepping-stone for the ETF’s popular country monographs. These linked labour market issues to training for each of the candidate countries, following a philosophy of which the ETF’s first director **Peter de Rooij** quipped: “To most policymakers, training issues are a boring matter, but link them to employment and unemployment and you’ll harvest a lot more interest.”

⁴ IPA is the EU’s Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. It is the framework for EU support to reforms in the accession countries. Its second cycle (EUR 11.7 billion) ends in 2020. A third cycle is planned for the period 2021–2027.

FROM COUNTRY EXPERT TO GLOBAL ACTOR

ONE OF THE RUNNING JOKES WHEN EXPLAINING THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION IN THE 1990S WAS THAT IT DOES NOT OPERATE IN THE EU, IT DOES NOT PROVIDE TRAINING AND IT IS NOT A FOUNDATION.

Introducing the ETF to an audience that had never heard of it could be a daunting task.

To complicate matters further, one of the first important networks that the ETF established in partner countries where it knew hardly anyone and hardly anyone knew the ETF, was a network of observatories whose remit was consistently misunderstood. Observatories, after all, are places where astronomers gaze at the stars.

Everything took a lot of explaining and ETF staff often felt that just being taken seriously could be an uphill struggle. Even the signals from Brussels about the direction of the agencies could be rather mixed every now and then.

As Head of the VET policy unit in the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, **Gordon Clark** was directly responsible for Commission relationships with the ETF in that critical period between 1999 and 2005. Within the European Commission, there were rather diverging views on the roles of the agencies, with some directorate-generals seeing them as an executive arm to be used for programme management, while others wanted to develop them into think-tanks.

“When, in 2002, we developed the EU VET strategy through the Copenhagen Process, this provided opportunities for both Cedefop and the ETF to develop their expertise further,” says Gordon Clark.

“ETF director Peter de Rooij saw that and recruited people to enhance the agency’s expertise. But that was his initiative and it was not quite universally supported in Brussels. There were two schools of thought in Brussels. In fact, there were even two schools of thought within the ‘mother directorate’, which at that time still was the DG for education and culture. The old school lost out gradually.”

“Eventually, Nikolaus Van der Pas who was Director-General for Education and Culture between 2000 and 2005, was very open to giving credit to the ETF as a knowledge hub, rather than a house of administrators. Gradually there was some movement.”

**OPPORTUNITIES
FOR BOTH
CEDEFOP
AND THE
ETF
TO DEVELOP THEIR
EXPERTISE FURTHER**

CRITICAL MASS OF EXPERTISE

Borhene Chakroun is Director of the Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems at UNESCO. He worked at the ETF until 2010. He agrees that delivering the ETF message in the first decade was not always easy, but he does not think that this was simply a consequence of the ETF being unknown.

“It was not the ETF that people did not want to listen to. It was the message that people did not want to listen to. The message of the importance of vocational education and training! The theme was not attractive politically. It was considered a non-appropriate pathway.”

For the European Commission, that changed when the Lisbon Strategy pushed training several rungs up the list of political priorities. A change of tack of this magnitude in the middle of accession preparations for a dozen countries required an agent to break

this to the partner countries. And there happened to be an agent that was just ready to take on this task: the ETF.

“There was this critical mass of expertise that the ETF had nurtured through investment and recruitment and years of work that put it in the best position to become an important player,” says Borhene Chakroun.

“Until then, the ETF had run on two distinct legs: one of project management and one of expertise. One of these was removed when the ETF mandate was recast 15 years ago and we should recognise former director Muriel Dunbar’s contribution there.”

Gordon Clark recognises this turning point too. “Some years after 2005, and after I changed position in Brussels, I was back at the ETF for a meeting. I think it was about qualification frameworks. I

remember being really impressed by the expertise of the colleagues in topics such as entrepreneurship, career guidance and work-based learning. They certainly had acquired a niche position in that field which had a relevance well beyond just the neighbouring regions.”

The expertise was based on evidence, part of which had been gathered through the network of observatories we mentioned earlier.

The observatories were an important first step in this long process of acquiring the evidence that would become the second cornerstone in the work of the ETF. But the legacy of the observatories goes well beyond it being the cradle of education, training and labour market monitoring in a large number of transition countries surrounding the EU. The observatories also had institutional offspring that survive to this day.

NURTURED THROUGH INVESTMENT AND RECRUITMENT

Olga Oleynikova must be one of the people who has worked longest with the ETF. She is the director of the Centre for VET Studies in Moscow.

“The ETF is part of the history of my organisation, and an important part of it,” she says.

“It is thanks to the ETF that the National Observatory for VET was transformed into the Centre for VET Studies. This is now a full-fledged Russian legal entity.”

“Earlier, the ETF used to implement projects and organise numerous events in Russia, which made it a partner in research and a guru in the modernisation activities in the field of VET. The inputs from various

ETF events going back to the 1990s have triggered major national modernisation efforts and launched social partnership in VET, a national qualifications framework, occupational standards, the transition to the competence-based programmes, and new approaches to student-centred teaching and learning, to mention just a few.”

“Initially, most of the ETF support came in the form of projects. This meant direct support for activities such as workshops and study tours. Later, the support moved to the level of expert advice, access to publications and consultations that the ETF always willingly provided. The ETF became a real centre of expertise for us.”

“But even today, the ETF is a key source of relevant information and expertise in diverse aspects of VET development. It is also, importantly, a friend and colleague. Being part of the ETF National Observatories project, our organisation transferred the acquired culture of learning from the ETF to our own operation, and later to the work of the Centre for VET Studies. Part of this new culture is continuing professional development for our own staff that we introduced from the very start. We have tried to disseminate this culture of professional development to our colleagues across the VET system.”

Marko Vukašinić from the education ministry of Montenegro also clearly remembers how ETF support gradually changed.

“In the beginning, the ETF colleagues were messengers and mediators of expertise from the EU and from other countries in the EU neighbourhood. Through the years we developed our own capacity. The involvement of the ETF changed with our progress. They became co-designers and advisers. They also started helping us to tell our story. They were our lighthouse.”

“Today the role of the ETF in Montenegro is mostly supportive, not completely equal yet but jointly thinking through what could be done. They are there to assist.”

In the wake of this transformation from knowledge exchange to house of experts that transpired in the first decade of the 21st century, another interesting shift took shape. A shift, so gradual that few will have noticed it consciously: the bonding of this house of experts into a house of expertise.

One of the recurring themes in all witness accounts from this period is that people remember the individuals whose dedication made a difference in specific partner countries more than the ETF as a whole. They remembered individual staff, not the organisation. This is no longer so.

Madlen Serban, who was to become the third ETF director in 2009, knew this from personal experience working with the ETF in her native Romania since 1996.

“I had some fantastic ETF people I worked with during my time in Romania, but that also showed a weakness in the first 10 or 15 years of the agency: the ETF was an organisation of individuals. In Brussels, as well as in the partner countries, they knew who the people of the ETF were, but not what the ETF was.”

“We were lucky in Romania – we worked with the crème-de-la-crème of ETF staff: very committed people who worked with us as critical friends. But

the ETF was perceived to be the sum of the ETF staff you met. When I came to Turin, already during my years as an observer on the Governing Board, I got to know a very different ETF. It was far more than that. There were many different people. In Romania we were not in contact with that many. They had experience with other countries and had different outlooks. They were good at other things in different ways.”

“When I was appointed the new director in 2009, I suddenly found myself in a position of having to do the things that I had always asked the ETF to do and it was not always easy. It was more than working to improve vocational education and training. Suddenly I had to work for

the relationships of the ETF and this was not so easy, when all people knew about the ETF was the people they had worked with directly. The ETF was a collection of individuals, not an organisation with one voice. Changing that became a priority for me as director. We were not a research institution with PhD students. We were an action research institution. We didn't count our success in numbers of published articles but in results in the partner countries.”

“One of the things we introduced was the country rotation, where staff move from country to country. It is still there. It sent out a signal that, whoever comes to your country, the ETF is backing it up.”

WE WORKED WITH THE CRÈME-DE-LA-CRÈME OF ETF STAFF

GEMM

GOVERNANCE FOR EMPLOYABILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, OR GEMM, WAS A REGION-WIDE PROGRAMME COVERING EIGHT COUNTRIES IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST. IT RAN FROM 2013 TO 2016. IN EACH COUNTRY THE ETF HELPED TO BRING TOGETHER THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, REGIONAL AUTHORITIES, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, TRAINING INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL SERVICES. COACHED BY THE ETF, THEY SET UP PILOT PROJECTS EXPLORING NOVEL WAYS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING GOVERNANCE.

For Morocco, GEMM came at an opportune time. The country was in the midst of a regionalisation strategy, based on its already flourishing automobile sector. This meant a massive upsurge in real jobs calling for specific qualifications.

The regional actors chose Tangier-Tétouan for the pilot project, where the Renault-Nissan and Peugeot-Citroën factories and their many suppliers are situated. GEMM supported a collaborative governance network and compiled good practice that could be replicated in other regions. One of its direct outcomes was the creation of the Observatoire des Branches under the aegis of the employers' organisation, the Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc. The observatory gathers data, analyses it and, in the words of its director, **Mohamed Slassi Sennou**, “arms the private sector with mechanisms for strategic development.”

“Through economic, infrastructural, environmental and cultural analysis at a regional level we can bring about the emergence of ‘smart specialisations’ – sectors that can act as the locomotives for a region,” he says.

“You must prepare and anticipate skills needs and produce them in real time – that is the major challenge.”

Two new projects – one on agriculture and agro-industry in Fez-Meknes and the other involving exporting local products from the semi-desert province of Rehamna – replicate the GEMM project and use its results to the full, in terms of multi-level governance, and strategic and operational observation to help the ecosystem with decision-making. They have received EUR 3 million in funding from the Agence Française de Développement. The key to sustaining this momentum, according to Mr Slassi Sennou, is to involve the private sector in a systemic way.

“Through the ecosystem approach, in which all the actors are involved together, you can have a more agile response in a constantly changing environment. In developed countries people are used to working together. But in countries like ours it doesn't come naturally so you have to accompany it for multi-actor projects.”

STRASBOURG SUMMIT

1989

A European Training Foundation is proposed at the Strasbourg Summit by the European Council to support the newly independent countries next to the EU



Fall of the Berlin Wall



EU Phare Programme

1990



Collapse of the Soviet Union and war in Yugoslavia



Tempus Programme for higher education

1991

Opening of the ETF in Turin, Italy, under the leadership of Peter de Rooij



EU Tacis Programme

1994

ETF TURIN



1995

The ETF starts working with the countries of the former Soviet Union



Barcelona process 1995-2015
the Mediterranean, our common future

Barcelona Process for the southern and eastern Mediterranean

FORMER SOVIET UNION



1996

The ETF starts working in the Western Balkans



European Single Market comes into force

WESTERN BALKANS



1997



EU membership discussions begin for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

1998



Employment and training emphasised by EU presidencies

The ETF's geographical coverage expands southwards to the Mediterranean region

MEDITERRANEAN REGION



2000

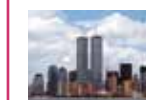
The ETF begins to shift its role from project management towards becoming a centre of expertise



Lisbon Strategy

CENTRE OF EXPERTISE

2001



The World Trade centre is attacked by terrorists



EU CARDS Programme for the Western Balkans

The ETF starts working in the Western Balkans

2002



The Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced cooperation in VET



Introduction of the Euro

COPENHAGEN DECLARATION

ETF ADVISORY FORUM

2003



Members of the ETF Advisory Forum discuss the results of over 10 years' work in vocational training reform

10 NEW COUNTRIES JOIN THE EU

2004



Muriel Dunbar becomes director of the ETF

2005



EU guidelines on growth and jobs



The Kyoto Protocol to limit global warming comes into force

2007



The ETF changes its approach to match the new EU instruments

New instruments supporting the EU's external assistance goals

NEW EU INSTRUMENTS

2008



Romania and Bulgaria join the EU

The recast regulation redefines the ETF's area of activity as 'human capital development'

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

2009



Lisbon Treaty

Madlen Serban becomes director of the ETF

LISBON TREATY

2010



Launch of the Torino Process

TORINO PROCESS



European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and training

2011



New Skills for New Jobs report



The Arab Spring shakes the Arab region

Launch of the Qualifications Platform

QUALIFICATIONS PLATFORM

20TH ANNIVERSARY

SEVEN STRATEGIC PROJECTS

NEW SKILLS AGENDA

FUTURE OF WORK & SKILLS

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

2012

2013

2014



2015



2016

2017



2018



2019



2020

Global inventory of skills and migrant support measures



Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for better socio-economic outcomes



Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the European Union

The ETF celebrates its 20th anniversary



Croatia joins the EU



European Alliance for Apprenticeships

The ETF's work is based on seven strategic projects



Sustainable Development Goals agreed by the United Nations



Riga conclusions on vocational education and training

2016



New Skills Agenda for Europe

Cesare Onestini becomes director of the ETF



The African Union-EU summit agrees on investment in youth and skills

ETF high-level conference on the future of work and skills



Education, training and lifelong learning in the EU Pillar of Social Rights



Special focus on youth at the EU-Western Balkans summit

Launch of Open Space social media platform on the ETF 25th anniversary



POLICY ADVICE AND SUPPORT

WE STARTED THIS PUBLICATION BY LOOKING AT HOW THE ETF SUPPORTS THE EXTERNAL SERVICES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. WITHOUT THIS MANDATE, THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN AN ETF.

But outside Brussels, the ETF is better known for the substance of its support than for its internal EU mandate: human capital policy and system development in countries that receive EU support to this end. Yet, mandate and substance are intricately linked.

After a decade of amassing knowledge about a topic that in the eyes of many policymakers of the time was obscure at best and superfluous at worst, the ETF had arguably become the world's main repository for expertise on vocational education and training in transition countries. Classic proof of this was that The Economist used (duly credited) ETF information for its Intelligence Unit when it quoted labour market data from partner countries – without the ETF initially being aware of this. In a relatively short period of time, the information gathering network of the ETF had become the most credible source of labour market and training data from the transition countries of eastern Europe and central Asia and to some extent north Africa and the near Middle East.

This gave the ETF the momentum it needed when, as we mentioned earlier, the Lisbon Strategy moved education and training towards the very centre of policymaking in human capital development.

It moved the ETF to develop a methodology by which the EU could sustainably help partner countries to transition towards knowledge economies and continue to transition in a world that would demand ever greater flexibility from individuals as well as from governments. This became the cradle of the 'policy learning' approach that was introduced at the Learning Matters conference in 2003 and has since then in some form or other been the very essence, and greatest success story, of ETF support.

Policy learning would become a third cornerstone of the work of the ETF and perhaps the most important one. The reason it became so successful was probably genius in simplicity.

It was a methodology that practised the same thing it preached. Lifelong learning was becoming the new education mantra and policy learning was lifelong learning for education policymakers.

Madlen Serban remembers how it reverberated in Romania in the first years of the new millennium.

"The ETF helped us in developing this process of critical and forward thinking. Politicians all suffer from short-termism but the ETF outlived politicians."

"This became the greatest benefit of the ETF: it went beyond handing out fish. The ETF had the time and stamina to teach us how to fish."

Ms Serban also saw that the ETF was a great strategic partner for stakeholders in education and training with perceived conflicts of interest. It helped her to learn some of the tricks of the trade that she could later apply for the ETF in other countries.

"It is important to remember that vocational education and training is a field of multiple stakeholders. So, if you want to make something sustainable you need a collaborative process. If you represent one of the participating institutions in this collaborative process, you are not the best trusted, regardless of whether you are a principal, a trade unionist, an employer or a politician. Thus, in very complex dialogues, there often was a role to play for a neutral external broker. This was particularly important then, but in some countries it still is today."

**TO MAKE SOMETHING
SUSTAINABLE
YOU NEED A
COLLABORATIVE
PROCESS**

In Georgia, it was difficult to get stakeholders involved.

“The ETF encouraged us to do this through pilots and it worked, but it has not been easy”, says **Irina Tserodze**.

“In 2015, we started with just two work-based learning programmes. Now we have 13 and more than 60 private companies engaged in them.”

“European involvement helped to convince stakeholders to engage. It also added weight for students who wanted to enrol. Because of course in Georgia, nobody really trusted the proposal from the government.”

Also **Marko Vukašinić** remembers the importance of the ETF as a broker when his ministry needed to convince stakeholders to engage in change.

“The ETF represented someone who is neutrally credible and had a vast experience that was universally recognised. As such, the opinion of the ETF was very important to convince people – social partners in particular. If the ETF threw its weight in the ring there was a chance that we would stop talking and that things would get moving.”

Vukašinić agrees that an important strength of policy learning was indeed the process of learning together, but he also underlines how much personal capacity building it brought about, both in the ministry and among other stakeholders in education and training.

“For me cooperation with the ETF always was an opportunity to build my own competences as an add-on. When I started out here in Montenegro,

as the ministry of a young country we still had a lot to learn. My department [for international cooperation] was only established in 2002. For the ministry, the ETF was like a critical friend, bringing ideas to our attention and helping us to understand issues.”

So, what you learn through policy learning is as important as how you learn it and who you learn it with, and the ETF is credited by many as the organisation that brought people around the policy development table that had not traditionally met there: employers, trade unions, even schools that had never really been asked for their opinions. Over time, the ETF would bring in many new ideas and modes of cooperation.

THE ETF WAS LIKE A CRITICAL FRIEND

A BIG TRANSFORMATION BOTH FOR THE VET SYSTEM AND FOR THE REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Rodion Kolyshko is Director for labour potential development at the Confederation of Employers of Ukraine. His introduction to education policy development came in 2010.

“The ETF just invited us to a meeting on qualifications framework design in 2010 or 2011,” he says. “We had been introduced to the subject of national qualifications frameworks by the British Council the year before so, in retrospect, the ETF really came at the right place and time historically. But we had no idea what was going to happen because we had never heard about this European Training Foundation. We were just invited to an event here in Kyiv.”

“Everything was new for us and indeed for many of the others gathered around the table.”

“One of these things that none of us had ever really thought about before the ETF came around was to reconsider the autonomy of vocational schools. Education and training are still very centralised here. The novel understanding and meaning of autonomy was very interesting. I was involved in the design and realisation of part of this as a local expert and it was fascinating.”

“Another thing is what happened when we rapidly decentralised the financing of VET in Ukraine. We needed input on the required regional and local responsibilities and who needed to be trained. The ETF showed us how it was done in other countries. In late 2015, the system changed with the central budget devolved to regional authorities in 24 regions. That was a big transformation, both for the VET system and for the regional authorities. Now the regional VET councils decide who is trained, how they are trained and what institutions are needed.”

“We’re still not quite there, but that is by no means the fault of the ETF. Their input into these processes was very timely and needed. To be frank, there were years where the ETF was the only window we had to EU practice in VET, qualifications and many related issues. They were very active in pushing the reforms in Ukraine.”

“Today, we are embedded in international networks and have more sources of information, but there were years when the ETF was one of the few sources of good practice. Perhaps not all of us were ready for all that information, but we did come around eventually! The very comprehensive reforms that we are working on now, centred on the New Ukrainian School, are built very much on a foundation laid by the ETF.”

In Jordan, **Nayef Stetieh** has run the Business Development Centre since 2004. The centre supports small companies, helps to engage women and young people in business, and runs programmes to develop skills for employability – three topics that have been high on the ETF’s cooperation agenda for partner countries in North Africa and the near Middle East.

Initially, for Mr Stetieh and his Business Development Centre, ETF support came in a quite different form than for most.

“We never started our programmes to be commercial programmes. We designed them based on, often hidden, market needs. They were interactive hands-on programmes. I believed from the beginning that if we really wanted to bring about change, we had to involve education institutions in what we do and embed our programmes in schools run by the Ministry of Education. In the process towards achieving that, it is hard to understate the support of the ETF.”

“In 2006, we were engaged in an ETF competition in Brussels for best practice in SME development. We were so excited about it and we received the best practice certificate, which turned

out to be a kind of certification for us that really opened doors in Jordan.”

“Since then, ETF endorsement has repeatedly helped us mainstream new ideas. When we started working with women mentorship and engaging women in financing, for example, ETF endorsement made most of the donors start to look at doing similar things.”

“ETF seminars and events have really enriched our knowledge and experience and given us tools that we would have otherwise found hard to acquire. They brought experiences from international partners which really helped us in identifying better techniques and methodologies.”

“Our involvement with the ETF kept teaching us new techniques and exposing us to new experiences. Even at the last meeting in Torino, in late 2019, I did a workshop and was introduced to the ETF platform ‘Open Space’ which looks like such a promising format for exchanging ideas that we are going to set up something similar here in Jordan.”

EVIDENT POLICY PROGRESS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Almost 20 years after independence, schools in the former soviet countries of Central Asia still find it hard to satisfy the needs of the labour market and prepare a workforce equipped with relevant skills for the future. Between 2012 and 2019, the EU has supported regional dialogue on education between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan through the Central Asia Education Platform⁵ (CAEP). The main purpose is to prepare the educational systems of these countries for a future in globalised economic and labour markets. Throughout this period, the ETF has played a prominent role in the project.

One of the defining activities of the ETF in CAEP has been to promote evidence-based policymaking in the region, raising awareness of the

importance of policy strategies based on scientific evidence and the use of quantitative and qualitative data to shape relevant decisions.

As an example of work carried out with the help of the ETF, in Kazakhstan, the team developed a number of surveys for training providers. These tools will support training needs analysis among teachers and will help to evaluate the impact of teachers’ upskilling. The key training providers have already started to use these surveys.

In Tajikistan, the members of the national team made several suggestions on how to improve the structure of the administrative data provided by the schools to the ministry of education. As a result, the data received by the policymakers are more

detailed and offer better evidence for further decisions on the reform of education.

In Kyrgyzstan, the recommendations of the group have positively influenced a new educational database that improved the collection of administrative data provided by the schools.

The work took place in national teams in all Central Asian countries with the representatives of ministries of education, ministries of labour and research institutes. Regional cooperation was formalised at a high-level CAEP meeting in Astana, where ministers signed a declaration for future mutual cooperation. The document highlighted cooperation and dialogue in areas such as qualification frameworks, quality assurance and accreditation, employment and labour market needs, innovative teaching methods, education financing, prevention of violent radicalisation through education and gender equality.

It is worth noting that the most active EU partners in the project are former ETF partner countries: Latvia, Poland and more recently, Romania.

A continuation is currently being considered.

⁵ CAEP I for 2012–2015 and CAEP II for 2015–2019.

BEST PRACTICE IN SME

DEVELOPMENT

KEEPING A FINGER ON THE PULSE

ALL THIS WORK ESTABLISHING NETWORKS, PUTTING HEADS TOGETHER AND LEARNING COLLECTIVELY EVENTUALLY LED TO THE LAUNCH OF WHAT LLUÍS PRATS CALLS “THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF THE ETF” – THE TORINO PROCESS.

Launched in 2010 and going through its fifth cycle in 2020, the Torino Process is the framework through which all ETF partner countries report to the ETF and each other on progress and innovation in training for skills. There is a Torino Process round every two years. The exercise is not unlike what EU Member States started to do through the Copenhagen Process 20 years ago. It involves subtle elements of competition and mutual learning – policy learning – that have stood the test of time particularly well.

“It is basically something very simple,” says **Lluís Prats**. “You bring all stakeholders in a country together around the table and get them to talk about VET reforms. Some of the ETF partner countries had education planners that had never talked to businesses before. VET without talking to employers! Think about it! If the people who are going to employ our graduates don’t believe in what we are

but working with vocational education and training was new to us. In Ukraine, traditionally, the government decided on training issues. Very locally, employers could get involved, but never nationally, at the level of the employers’ associations.”

The Torino Process is much more than ‘just’ bringing all stakeholders in human capital development around the table.

stewardship the Torino Process saw the light of day.

“Much of the Torino Process was born out of this dilemma. Stakeholders, including the national authorities, had to listen to each other and then find solutions together that were tailored to national needs. National governments had to move away from the prevailing, but rather authoritarian narrative that

THE IDEA WAS NOTHING SHORT OF REVOLUTIONARY

doing, then what are we doing here! And sometimes it takes a while, but eventually most are very grateful for these new round tables.”

It sounds simple indeed, but in many countries the idea was nothing short of revolutionary. In Ukraine, for **Rodion Kolyshko** and his Confederation of Employers, every kind of involvement in policy development was new.

“We had dealt with classical affairs like collective bargaining and such

In a way, it is the most refined form of policy learning yet.

It was born out of the same, most basic principle of teaching methodologies: new knowledge sticks best when learners discover it themselves.

“In Romania, one of the great dilemmas for stakeholders such as schools, trade unions and employers, was that it was difficult to convince policymakers to listen to the advice of the ETF,” says **Madlen Serban**, under whose

they were in charge and that therefore they knew what was best.”

“The ETF used to have clear ideas of necessary change but just passing them on was going to improve little. Ideas must be bred locally.”

By comparing solutions among peer countries, the Torino Process achieved an openness to alternatives that would prove to be a much more fertile soil for innovation than central planning.

Jeroen Willems saw that part of the impact of the Torino Process in his region when he was still posted in Azerbaijan.

“The Torino Process helps to sharpen the minds in all participating countries,” he says. “They compare their relative progress in VET reforms and the next steps to sustainably address the skills mismatch. I see the ETF footprint not only in the topics on the policy agenda in all of these countries, but also in the way this agenda is drawn up: through a process that involves all of the key stakeholders. As such the ETF does not just preach what partner countries should do but makes them formulate it themselves with the help of all relevant actors in their own reform processes and with the help of peers in other countries through the Torino Process.”

So, by and large, the Torino Process is a participatory exercise. But does it reach where it must or are there still blind spots that require future attention?

“That is different from country to country and depends on the extent to which VET reform is a policy priority and supported by highest levels of government,” says Jeroen Willems.

“Ten years ago, VET reform was still not a priority in many of the ETF partner countries. Backed by a new European agenda, the ETF pushed delegations and key stakeholders in all countries to prioritise it. Now all six countries in the Eastern Partnership have made it a priority again.”

THE TORINO PROCESS

HELPS TO SHARPEN THE MINDS IN ALL PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

A TOOL FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND SELF-REFLECTION

“I say ‘again’ because the baseline was not so bad when the Soviet Union collapsed. Then it was ignored for some time in pretty much all former communist countries. Now, as they work towards strengthening their economies, there is an increased realisation of the untapped potential of VET, not just as a last resort option for young people that have no alternatives, but as part of the engine that makes an economy work. Doctors, lawyers, programmers and engineers are not enough to keep the economy in swing. You also need very good skilled workers: plumbers, builders, welders.”

While the level of ETF involvement varies from country to country, all partner countries participate in the Torino Process. Some countries even participate at a regional level, with separate states or provinces producing separate Torino Process reports. One of these is Russia.

“In the Russian Federation, the Torino Process is actually the only current ETF activity, but it is very valuable,” says **Olga Oleynikova**. “As a tool for self-evaluation and self-reflection, the process supports VET system development by providing an opportunity to look critically into our own operation and compare our own developments and achievements with those in other countries.”

More than anything else, the Torino Process is a driver for change in the partner countries, but it has spin-offs in all directions. The national reports help the ETF itself to continually grow its own expertise in the same way the national observatories did earlier, while the cross-country analyses that the ETF prepares after each round help it respond to that other key role of the agency that we mentioned at the start of this publication: to inform EU external assistance.

AN APPRECIATING STOCK OF EXPERTISE



While the primary role of the ETF is to shape EU assistance to skills development in countries outside the EU, the Torino Process results reverberate far beyond policymaking in Brussels. They feed into human capital development policy in countries and organisations outside the agency's original and primary mandate.

With the world globalising ever more rapidly, skills have become a currency in labour markets that often extend well beyond the borders of nation states. And even when these skills are not physically taken abroad by the people

who carry them, they are essential to the competitiveness of their home countries in a global market.

This same global trade market and the need for some level of harmonisation that comes with it, has also quite dramatically increased the value of ETF expertise. This, after all, is where the EU really shines: in making people work together and learn from each other internationally. So the work of the ETF is in demand internationally and it is, more than ever, being looked at for guidance.

Many international organisations now support human capital development in countries that the ETF works with. Over the years, close working relationships have been developed with international partners such as the ILO – which incidentally has a strong training base in Turin, the World Bank, UNESCO and of course the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the ETF's 'sister agency' Cedefop. Many projects have also been carried out with the invaluable assistance of national development agencies from EU Member States that have traditionally been active either in the ETF partner regions or specifically in human capital development. And conversely, these EU-based agencies often call on the evidence, support and expertise of the ETF.

Coordinating support with peer organisations and agencies is not just good practice and a way of countering duplication. If done well, joint foreign assistance can add tremendous value to the sum of all isolated support activities.

As a simple example and sticking with the topic of the previous chapter, if all actors working to support human capital development in ETF partner countries have access to the Torino

Process reports, they can save valuable human and financial resources that would otherwise have been needed to test the ground. It can also help them root their activities in local practice because the reports are drawn up within the countries by national stakeholders.

If donors coordinate their activities, even at a basic level, different organisations can take on different, perhaps more specialised support roles. There are ever more good examples of this in the cooperation of the ETF with other international donors. We mentioned earlier the ETF's expanding work on qualifications frameworks in Ukraine after the British Council had introduced the topic. In the same country, the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) took over the implementation of EU support after the ETF had assisted with the blueprints for comprehensive policy reform.

The latter direction is one that we will likely see more examples of in the years ahead: the ETF preparing the ground and assisting a national platform of stakeholders in designing (themselves!) the framework and blueprint of reforms, then passing on the actual implementation of EU assistance to Member-State or international actors.

Borhene Chakroun, who went from the ETF to UNESCO and therefore has a perspective from both sides, is very appreciative of how the ETF operates in the international family of donor organisations.

“Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have returned to the agenda, even in the Sustainable Development Goals where there are two exclusive targets on skills and one that is related to skills⁶. And, of course, after the financial crisis youth unemployment became a bigger issue. So it is important to put the dynamics and the work of the ETF in that new context.”

“By providing a critical mass of expertise and a continuity of the institutional investment in skills and the labour market, the agency became a key actor in the discussion globally and an elective member of the interagency group⁷. This itself is proof that it is now one of the institutions with significant expertise in the fields of skills and

⁶ See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

⁷ The Inter-Agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (IAG-TVET) was established by UNESCO in 2008. See: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/skills-work-and-life/interagency-cooperation>

employment. Although geographically it is still confined, it is still an important a source of active expertise.”

“The collaborative work of the ETF and UNEVOC is a good example. We have this global leadership training programme, where we train TVET leaders. We invited the ETF to participate both in management and expertise. In our Paris headquarters we have a sound collaboration on quite different initiatives such as work-based learning, labour market forecasting, entrepreneurship, qualifications and recognition of skills. ETF expertise is both recognised and valued highly here.”

THE COLLABORATIVE WORK OF THE ETF AND UNEVOC IS A GOOD EXAMPLE

ESTABLISH AND GROW OUR
OWN NETWORKS AND
ACCESS
EXPERIENCE
FROM MANY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Working closely with other international agencies also benefits the ETF partner countries.

Anar Beishembaeva is Chief Inspector at the Agency of Initial Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education and Science in the Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan. She started her cooperation with the ETF back in 1996 when an observatory was established in Bishkek. She became the observatory coordinator. This turned into the Forum for Educational Initiatives which still exists today. It eventually became a UNESCO-UNEVOC centre with the help of the ETF.

“Because the ETF works with so many different organisations it helps us to establish and grow our own networks and access experience from many different countries,” says Anar Beishembaeva.

“If you work with a national agency, you have limited access to partner institutions and experts. The ETF has such a big network that it can find the best match for everyone. We had, for example, a partnering project with colleagues in St Petersburg under the ETF’s School Development Programme. They shared the same Soviet history and their experience was a perfect match for us.”

TOWARDS A GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE HUB

“WITNESS ACCOUNTS MAKE CLEAR THAT ONE OF THE GREATEST STRENGTHS OF THE ETF HAS BEEN TO TAILOR SUPPORT TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF A COUNTRY. AS THE SCOPE OF ITS WORK, BOTH GEOGRAPHICALLY AND THEMATICALLY, STANDS TO BE EXTENDED IN THE YEARS AHEAD, THE GREAT CHALLENGE WILL BE TO CONTINUE TO DIFFERENTIATE SUPPORT,”

says **Cesare Onestini**, who has been the ETF director since 2017.

“EU investment in human capital development is expected to grow under the next multiannual financial framework, so logically, we will be expected to leverage our expertise in support of EU external assistance. This means that we must make clear choices based on the expertise we have developed in the past 25 years.”

The opening words of the 2003 conference Learning Matters were: “The world is changing.”

Today we know that this change was not a phase, with a beginning and an end, but the new normal. Change is becoming a static given. The winners – be that individuals, companies or countries – are no longer those with the most knowledge or skills but those who most rapidly can acquire new knowledge or skills. For education and training, this means that the process, rather than its outcome, will increasingly become the aim.

“While the ramifications of this are enormous, they are not unexpected,” says Mr Onestini. “They are a very natural evolution of the drive towards lifelong learning that has fuelled education and training reforms since the beginning of this century. The ETF has had plenty of time to prepare and

has used it. We are ready to take on the challenge.”

“We will continue to work closely with our partner countries, the European Commission and international partners to better understand the impact of technology and other drivers of change on skills, the implications of this for public policy and governance of education and training systems, and how training provision can adapt to changing learning environments and the skills requirements of businesses and people.”

“In the years ahead, you will see the ETF more active in the fields of vocational excellence, new learning and teaching, and skills needs for sustainable, inclusive and innovation-oriented societies.”

**EU INVESTMENT IN
HUMAN
CAPITAL
IS EXPECTED TO GROW**

Lluís Prats thinks that, with the current political agenda, the role of the ETF in the EU's neighbourhood policy will only increase.

"There are two enormous elephants in the room in every conversation about the future of the EU. One is migration, the other is globalisation. These are incredibly complex issues that you and I are not going to solve in the next 15 minutes, but what we already know is that in the equation to solve these complex issues there is an important element which is the economic development of our neighbouring

countries. It is not going to happen by Morocco suddenly overtaking Switzerland. Or Tunisia becoming the most important IT hub. This is not going to happen. These economies are first and foremost going to develop more sophisticated products than they already are engaged in producing. This requires quality vocational education and training, so those 120 people in Turin have an enormous responsibility helping them to develop it and preparing an adequate response to these development needs from the European Union."

ONE IS MIGRATION THE OTHER IS GLOBALISATION

IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE LEARNING FROM THE EU EXPERIENCE

From the perspective of a partner institution, **Borhene Chakroun** of UNESCO is also convinced that there will continue to be a very relevant role for the ETF.

"I think there are areas where the ETF can be critical. First, it's important to continue learning from the EU experience. We need that bridge between EU developments and middle-income countries that the ETF has always provided so well. Second, the ETF can continue to play an important role in supporting countries in their reforms of skills and employment, particularly in line with EU aid, to make it more efficient and relevant to the needs of the countries. Third, the ETF is

a critical member of the interagency group (IAG) on TVET. We would like to continue seeing the ETF as an active player within that global community. Sharing expertise and engaging and contributing as they do."

One final point of note for the future work of the ETF concerns the general discourse on human capital development that seems to value skills more as an economic asset than as a social tool. This is not an ETF trend but a global trend whose consequences are felt at the ETF.

Madlen Serban is concerned that the EU focus on skills training should not go at the expense of education.

"I think the perspective should not become too narrow," she says. "If we concentrate only on work training, we will pay the price very soon. Education is also about learning and values. I would like to see education and training kept together. We also have to stand our ground against globalisation forces that push in this direction."

"We need to continue to pay attention to the individual and society as a whole. Even in the Torino Process, we have to remember that this is about human lives and livelihoods."

WORK-BASED LEARNING

ETF INITIATIVES ARE TYPICALLY INFORMED BY THE AGENDA OF EU POLICY DEVELOPMENTS. A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A SUPPORT AREA THAT TAKES MANY OF ITS CUES FROM EU DEVELOPMENTS IS THE FIELD OF WORK-BASED LEARNING.

It follows an increased focus on apprenticeships from the part of the EU after the establishment of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships

(EaFA) in 2013 and the Riga Conclusions⁸ in 2015. Work-based learning programmes are relevant for all levels of vocational education and training – initial, post-secondary and continuing vocational education and training. They can be implemented in any sector, from industry to services and agriculture, and are particularly relevant in sectors experiencing rapid structural and technological changes, or where the infrastructure of schools does not allow for proper practical training.

Work-based learning can be a win-win situation providing benefits for all major stakeholders involved: learners, employers and society. The ETF encourages and helps employers, social partners and other relevant stakeholders to actively engage in vocational education and training system governance to adjust training programmes to meet the requirements of modern labour markets.

The ETF has produced tools and handbooks that help policymakers and social partners to develop and implement work-based learning, both at the practical level and from a policy perspective.

Many partner countries have started to implement pilot projects or structural reform on apprenticeships or dual education with the support of the ETF. Assistance is also provided to the five EU candidate countries through their membership of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

In October 2018, the ETF convened its regional Eastern Partnership forum on work-based learning in vocational education and training in Lopota in Georgia. The country has the typical paradox of the eastern European transition countries: the economy is not creating enough jobs, but businesses complain about a shortage of qualified workers. This is why the country's private sector is so interested

in apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning.

“Learning in the workplace improves adaptation to the work environment and gives better work skills than learning in the classroom,” says **Elguja Meladze**, President of the Georgian Employers Association. “And no public education institution can keep up with the technological progress of businesses. So work-based learning is our top priority, and we are working actively with government and donors to realise it.”

At a similar meeting in Lviv, Ukraine, a year later, **Carmo Gomes**, the head of the ETF's Country Intelligence Unit, noted that work-based learning was often the go-to term for politicians and policymakers keen to offer a panacea for all that is wrong with VET. But getting on-the-job training within a quality-assured framework of VET was not so simple.

“Is it easy to bring employers to the table to discuss with public providers the organisation and funding of students in their workplaces? No,” she told delegates that included participants from Kazakhstan in addition to the Eastern Partnership countries. “And there is no European-wide model to export, but we do know that work-based learning graduates are more successful in getting a job.”

At the same meeting **Petro Korzhevskyi**, Ukraine's deputy minister of education and science, said that work-based learning could help young people become “more creative and successful” and that in the coming years the country wants to increase the share of vocational school graduates from under 20% to 45% of tertiary education students.

“Working with policymakers, ministries, schools and stakeholders from the labour market is essential to achieving that,” he added.

Eastern Partnership country priorities for increasing work-based learning differ. Armenia has prioritised engaging companies, while Azerbaijan is aiming to design and adopt a national legal framework on work-based learning. Moldova is working on a new apprenticeship law.

⁸ See for example: www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/european-ministers-endorse-riga-conclusions-vet

THE NEXT DECADE FOR THE ETF

THE “FIELDS OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE, NEW LEARNING AND TEACHING, AND SKILLS NEEDS FOR SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE AND INNOVATION-ORIENTED SOCIETIES” THAT CESARE ONESTINI, ETF DIRECTOR, REFERS TO AS FOCAL AREAS IN THE YEARS AHEAD TRANSLATE INTO THREE MULTIANNUAL, CROSS-COUNTRY ACTIVITIES.

They are called ‘Centres of Excellence’, ‘Creating New Learning’ and ‘Skills Lab’. Of course, neither of these represents a forage into entirely unfamiliar pastures for the ETF, but they are what knowledge gathering and dissemination will converge towards.

They are part of an ETF core service labelled ‘Knowledge hub’ – one of three core services lined up for delivery under the strategic plan for the years 2021–2027. The other two are ‘Policy advice and policy coaching in the area of education and training’ – the tried and tested delivery of policy learning – and ‘Reliable monitoring and diagnostics’ which covers, for example, the continued Torino Process.

Thematically, the strategy specifies that the ETF will consolidate its expertise in three holistic clusters:

SKILLS RELEVANCE AND ANTICIPATION

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICIES

SKILLS RELEVANCE AND ANTICIPATION

EQUIPPING CITIZENS WITH THE SKILLS THEY NEED FOR THE FUTURE IS A CHALLENGE FOR ALL COUNTRIES. IT IS, HOWEVER, ALSO AN IMPERATIVE.

ETF partner countries face particular challenges, ranging from economic competitiveness to social cohesion. Transparency of qualifications and labour mobility are other features that need to be taken into account. The complex demands on education and training systems as they address employability, innovation and inclusiveness in a lifelong perspective, will be the focus of the ETF's expertise work.

The ETF will also work on innovation potential and smart specialisation in emerging economic sectors as well as in traditional ones. The ETF's work on skills anticipation, qualifications, transition and mobility will target inclusiveness and innovation as key drivers of its actions and focus on increasing the use of big data and digital and online tools as means of amplifying its expertise and reach. The ETF will concentrate on working at system level, particularly targeting support to inclusion and equity, quality, diversification of provision and innovation.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IS RECOGNISED AS A KEY PILLAR OF ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICIES. HOWEVER, THE DEMAND FOR SKILLS HAS CHANGED.

So have the ways in which they are developed. There is now more emphasis on learning throughout life via informal and non-formal routes beyond the classroom. Key competences have become integral to professional development. This requires a rethink of skills development and attention to excellence, key competences and learning pathways.

PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICIES

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICIES IMPLY GOOD GOVERNANCE. THE PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS DEPENDS ON THEIR STRONG LINKS AND COORDINATION WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT.

The ETF will focus on the inclusion of less traditional actors in the skills policy dialogue. It will continue to support public-private partnerships and the reinforcement of cooperation mechanisms.

Maximising the quality of systems in the face of increasingly complex governance structures will remain a key objective of the ETF's work.

The ETF will promote a policy coaching approach in countries ready to engage in meaningful transformative reform with strong ownership and an adequate evidence base supporting decision-making in the sector.

LOOKING AHEAD

IT IS IN THE NATURE OF THE ETF MANDATE TO THINK AHEAD, ALL THE TIME. THE RECENTLY ADOPTED STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD TO 2027 SHOWS AN UNCHANGED DESIRE TO DO THIS, THINKING BOLDLY AND EMBRACING CONTINUOUS CHANGE.

Director **Cesare Onestini** believes the challenges facing us in the decade ahead require a profound reassessment of priorities: "Looking ahead into the next decade, we must rethink the models of economic growth,

taking into account the imperatives of sustainability and inclusion. We are aware of this and our vision of the ETF as an agent of change is developed around it."

"We need to ensure that action promoting people's skills is at the core of investment strategies. We are also aware of the need to look at globalisation differently in the future: being interconnected should not result in growing disparities but in shared prosperity."

"International cooperation – one of the pillars of EU action and the core of

the work of the ETF – will have to focus more on people rather than states and big business. International cooperation must support the capacity of citizens to drive change rather than suffer it."

"Finally, the next decade calls for a rethink of our models of social cohesion and inclusion. We need to take a fresh look at education and the roles that the state, the private sector, social partners and civil society have in it. We can already see this happening in Europe, but it must be extended to our partner countries and beyond, and here we can help better than anyone else."

THE ETF WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY ITS ROLE IN SUPPORTING THESE TRANSFORMATIONS, ENSURING THAT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTES TO SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES.

**WORKING
TOGETHER
LEARNING
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