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Vocational Training and Adult Education

**24TH ANNUAL EFVET INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE,
CYPRUS, 22 OCTOBER 2015**

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SPEAKING POINTS
PROGRESS TOWARD VET REFORM ACROSS EUROPE
THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION**

INTRODUCTION

- Congratulate EFVET for this 24th landmark in their history, and for the contribution they have made to strengthen VET cooperation in Europe.
- Thank the organisers for the invitation and for giving the Commission an opportunity to contribute to the event.
- EFVET is as usual 'spot on' in choosing the theme for this conference.
- Striving for **excellence and improving the attractiveness** of VET have been the focus of our work in the last years and is an overarching objective in European VET cooperation

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2014 EFVET MEETING

- Highlight main organisational and policy developments, at EU level in the last 12 months:
 - *New Commission*
 - *Commissioner Thyssen given specific mandate on Skills*
 - *VET and AL unit (and skills) moved from EAC to EMPL*
 - *EMPL restructuring as from 1 November 2015*
 - *Review of Copenhagen process – Riga MTD*
 - *Review of AL priorities (JR ET2020)*
 - *Adoption of JR ET2020 (Sep. COM + Nov. Council)*
 - *Re-boost of European Alliance for Apprenticeships*
 - *Conclusion of the 2 WG on VET and AL (2014-2015)*
 - *Mandate for 2 new WG*
(T&T in WBL, Workplace Learning)
 - *New Erasmus+ priorities and SME Apprenticeships call*
 - *2 new studies (EAFA assessment, Mapping T&T WBL)*
 - *Improvements on EQAVET and ECVET*
 - *Launch of European Pact for Youth (November 17)*
 - *Launch of work on new Skills Agenda (early 2016)*
 - *New push for VET mobility (EP and JD Institute)*
 - *The refugee crisis*
 - *Set-up of Expert group on EU VET providers + study*

POLICY CONTEXT

- There are currently 23 and a half million unemployed people across Europe – around 12 million have been so for more than a year. And more worrying still, 4.6 million young people cannot find jobs: There are more than 4.4 million early leavers from education and training and around 7 million 15-24 year olds in Europe are neither in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- Yet, we face the paradoxical situation where there are 2 million unfilled vacancies. Employers claim they cannot find people with the right skills to fill these posts. At the same time, Cedefop has recently conducted a study that shows that companies are not making full use of their staff's skills.
- There is an obvious skills mismatch that needs to be addressed.

COPENHAGEN PROCESS - REVIEW OF THE BRUGES COMMUNIQUE

- As you know the Copenhagen process brings together the EU, Member States, the social partners, the EFTA countries and the candidate countries. Together we discuss VET developments in Europe as well as agree on priorities to pursue together our work on enhanced cooperation on VET as called for in the Treaty (Art 166).

- In this context I would like to recall the Riga Conclusions that update the Bruges STD (2011-2014), with 5 new priorities agreed for the modernisation of VET over the next 5 years.
- The 5 priorities are focused and have a comprehensive approach to addressing systemic reforms in VET. Promoting work-based learning and apprenticeships is top of this list. Moreover, they seek to address quality assurance in VET including feedback loops strengthening VET provision and employability, improved access to qualifications for all, the development of key competences in VET (e.g. entrepreneurial skills), as well as the professional development of teachers and trainers.
- The Riga conclusions have been a big achievement to federate efforts around the goal of reforming VET systems in Europe and improving cooperation with stakeholders.
- EFVET and other European Associations supported the Riga conclusions with a Declaration, in a similar process they did in 2010 for the Bruges Communiqué.
- At the meeting in Riga in June, together with Ministers and European Social partners, the European Associations of VET providers were for the first time invited to participate in the full event [*in Bruges, they entered to present their Declaration and then went out*] – This time they stayed for all the meeting ! As it should be.

- The Riga conclusion also called upon the EU Commission to support Members States in different ways :
 - *Providing support to countries and monitoring progress (through Cedefop and ETF – thank James)*
 - *Strengthen the European Alliance for Apprenticeships*
 - *Support the implementation of transparency and recognition tools*
 - *Support mobility of VET learners and staff (also exploring the benefits of international mobility, outside the EU)*
- The VET providers have a key role in ensuring we attain these objectives.
- Yesterday in the "Innovation camp" we discussed what could be the role of EFVET in the future. Well I take this opportunity to challenge you to mobilize all European VET providers (*be they schools or companies*) to play an active role in VET policy setting and implementation. Help us improve the effectiveness, the quality and the attractiveness of VET.
- I hope one day the 6 European Associations of VET providers can come together to build a model similar to the America Association of Community Colleges, with a strong and respected voice contributing to EU VET.

EUROPEAN SKILLS AGENDA 2016

- The initiative is linked to the policy objective of moving Europe towards upward social convergence. It should raise the quality of E&T systems and facilitate intra-EU mobility, possibly even setting targets for work-based learning.
- The package will probably involve a Commission Communication on "European Skills Agenda", the revision of the Council Recommendation of the EQF as well as a revision of the Europass Decision.
- Main themes of the Skills strategy (to be confirmed):
 - Anticipating skill needs (demand)
 - Modernising skills provision (supply).
 - Recognition and transparency (EQF, Europass, Quality assurance and credit system)
 - Mobilizing financial resources (ESF, ERDF, ERASMUS+, EGF, Horizon 2020, EIB, etc.)
- Under the Social Pillar of the Juncker proposal for a "triple AAA" social Europe, we are currently also exploring the possibility of proposing a benchmark on skills to guarantee all citizens the right to a minimum level of skills.
- This would address all the ESL (around 4.4 million) as well as low-skilled adults (around 68 million), which include the many LTU.

VET INTERNATIONALIZATION AS A DRIVER FOR EXCELLENCE

- VET systems have much to gain from opening up to the world and understanding how best to cope with globalisation, while providing VET learners with the skills that our companies need to remain competitive when compared with our partners in developed and emerging economies.
- How can companies, employees, students, and teachers better understand and adapt to globalisation? How can VET providers better respond to the skill needs of people and companies that will increasingly be working in a global economy? How can they continuously modernise the content and provision of vocational training? How can they be abreast of the most advanced research and reform being undertaken by our global partners and competitors?
- These are questions that can best be answered if we engage and cooperate with our partners outside Europe.
- About 30 million jobs in the EU depend on trade with the rest of the world. In the future, 90% of world-wide growth is expected to be generated outside Europe. Grasping the opportunities offered by these external sources of growth will be critical for the future dynamism and sustainability of our economy.

- The race for talent is not only taking place in the higher education sector, but also at VET level. European VET systems must position themselves in this global context, and respond to the needs of the labour market. The higher education sector has been rather successful in this respect, but VET is lagging behind. Its time we catch up!
- Internationalisation of VET is not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieve excellence and attractiveness of VET, which are also key objectives of the Bruges communiqué.
- Strengthening the international dimension of VET, can increase its **attractiveness** by appealing to young learners looking for jobs with a global outlook.
- It can also contribute to **VET Excellence** by modernising the sector through international cooperation in evidence based policy making, as well as through learner and staff mobility.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- I would like to end this intervention today with a message of encouragement, and a challenge:

- **Encouragement** - Europe is facing enormous challenges. Globalisation, rebalancing of global power, ageing population, fast technological change, and the demand for labour market relevant skills. We need to adapt our E&T systems to provide the skills for our young to ease the transition from school to employment, and for the adults to continuously upskill and reskill to maintain their jobs. Together we have shown to be up to the challenge. Although the unemployment rates are still far too high. The situation is improving. In the last 12 months we have reduced the number of youth employment by almost 1 million.
- **Challenge** – VET providers have not been given the attention they deserve. Until recently you have been the missing link in the Copenhagen process, with a major role in making things happen, but only a minor role in deciding what is best for the modernisation and excellence in VET. We want to change this, and your contribution to the VET Ministerial in Riga is a symbol of this growing importance of EU VET providers. To strengthen this trend, we need strong VET provider associations, with good ideas, and the willingness to make a difference. Cooperate among yourselves, design and drive reforms, and make yourself heard. **Our ears are wide open in Brussels!**
- I wish you a very fruitful and successful conference.

PANEL DISCUSSION

PANELLISTS : **MS. REGITZE KRISTENSEN, TIETGEN,DK;**
MS. ANNA-KAISA NUUTAMO, HELSINKI BUSINESS COLLEGE, FI;
MR JAMES CALLEJA, CEDEFOP.

Question :

What type of collaboration do you think is crucial in order to realise the full potential of VET?

We need to go from a push to mobilise partners for cooperation to a real co-ownership of comprehensive partnerships. Companies and VET providers have a key role to play in this respect.

Even more critical than agreeing on the importance of partnerships, is **MAKING them happen!** This is what we are trying to do with 3 initiatives

- The **European Pact for youth** in cooperation with CSR Europe, to engage businesses: CSR Europe and the European Commission will launch a European Pact for Youth on November 17 to boost Business-Education Partnerships, i.e. between business, education and youth in Europe. In the next 2 years, 10.000 business-education partnerships will be established with the aim of identifying skills gaps, anticipating skills needs, increasing awareness of EU policies and funds to have more companies participating in EU initiatives and cooperating with the education world in providing skills. In concrete terms, 100.000 quality apprenticeships, traineeships or entry-level jobs are to be created.
- the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships**. Under this initiative, companies, social partners and education and training providers have committed to improving supply, quality and image of apprenticeships.
- the **Erasmus+ call** just published on 15/10 designed to support SMEs in offering apprenticeships. Cedefop is helping us by organising a matchmaking Conference on 9 and 10 November in Thessaloniki.