ACVT Bureau of 15 September 2014

MINUTES

Participants: Representatives of the 5 rotating Presidencies (EL, IT, LV, LU, NL), the ACVT BE representative (to assist the Bureau with his experience on the Bruges Communiqué), EU Social partners (UEAPME, ETUC, CEEP), Cedefop, ETF. BusinessEurope was absent and represented by UEAPME.

1. Opening

Mr Antonio Silva Mendes welcomed the participants to the enlarged ACVT Bureau and announced the changes brought by the new Commission and new portfolios defined. The transfer of VET and Adult learning policies, together with the management of Cedefop and ETF, to DG EMPL will not impede on the coherence of the ET2020 strategy and both policy files will continue to be part of the education continuum. Links between the two DGs will be reinforced with the change; nevertheless, at this moment in time, he underlined it was too early to provide answers to many of the practical questions that arose from participants. However, it is clear that both DGs are committed to working together for common goals and objectives of reforming education and training systems to ensure they equip people with the right set of skills needed for a modern society and working life, no matter which learning pathways learners embark upon. This change would be the opportunity to enrich the angles by which to look at the different topics.

The meeting was chaired by Ms Dana Bachmann, Head of Unit EAC/B2, Vocational training and adult education, Erasmus+.

2. 2015 Bruges Review and ET2020 mid-term stocktaking

Mr Youri Devuyst, from Unit EAC/A1, Education and training in Europe2020 governance, gave an overview of the ET2020 mid-term stocktaking process. He informed the meeting that the future strategic objectives for ET2020 were not yet defined and the analysis of National reports will only be available in Mid-November; the outcomes of the external evaluation (on the governance, working methods) will be ready by Mid-October and the Education and Training Forum of 9-10 October will allow for additional stakeholders from the civil society to make suggestions.

The High Level Group will discuss the overall conclusions coming from the various sources in Mid-December to prepare the draft Joint report for adoption by the Commission and discussions in the Council early 2015.
Some participants regretted that more information on the outcomes of the ET 2020 review was not yet available and they stressed the importance of presenting main conclusions in the DGVT in Rome, in order to build the future VET priorities on the basis of the new ET2020 strategic objectives. The Chair and Mr Joao Santos, Deputy Head of Unit B2, Vocational training and Adult education, Erasmus+, replied that it will be too early to have a clear understanding on new overarching priorities for ET 2020 as consultations were still ongoing with stakeholders (e.g. E&T Forum); however, extra efforts had been made to analyse the feed-back on the VET and AL chapters from the national reports so that they can feed into the proposals for discussion in Rome.

Ms Lore Schmid, from Cedefop, highlighted the conclusions of the Bruges monitoring for the STDs of 2011-2014 and explained the structure of the draft report. The main challenges where low progress was noticed, as already presented in previous meetings, could be confirmed (innovation and entrepreneurship, teachers and trainers, feedback loop from labour market into VET, ICT, cooperation among stakeholders). Also, strategies to communicate the added value of the European tools still tend to be fragmented. 4 clusters of countries could be identified based on the VET policy developments in terms of the ET2020 strategic objectives and linked to important socio-economic information. She acknowledged that impact of policy measures to implement 22 short-term deliverables is difficult to assess.

Ms Madlen Serban, from the ETF, explained the situation of candidate countries where the Bruges Communiqué was influencing policy development (together with the Torino process). The progress of these countries towards the majority of the STDs was limited, where attractiveness and monitoring groups at risks received more attention while validation and communication strategies on tools showed less progress. She remarked the policy development (strategies, legislation, etc.) needed to be complemented by progress in policy implementation and monitoring, an element where the countries were slightly less advanced. Montenegro was at present being assessed as to which policy actions had had more impact. She informed (upon request by ETUC) about a meeting on 5 October in Tirana to have a preparatory work with presentation for candidate countries representatives on DGVT and ACVT. She also clarified that according to the information provided by the National authorities, Social partners in the candidate countries were involved in the Bruges review process.

The Chair emphasized that, for the next period 2015-2017, indicators and monitoring were crucial to ensure assessment of the real impact and results of policies. She also pointed out that the new STDs proposed do not put into question the general validity of the Bruges Communiqué and its overall priorities.

Mr Joao Santos introduced the proposal of new STDs resulting from the discussions held in DGVT and ACVT this year. Continuity with the past had been sought, while acknowledging the different situation now, compared to when the Bruges Communiqué was adopted; indeed not only the socio-economic context has changed, but also many initiatives have been launched and new data were available (PIAAC, EAlFA etc.)

Mr Jan Varchola, from Unit EAC/B2, Vocational training and Adult education, Erasmus+, briefly explained the content of the discussion note, with the overall context, timeline, proposal for the 8 deliverables. He also stressed that at this stage the proposed deliverables were not linked to any ET2020 strategic objectives or the Bruges Communiqué (due to the uncertainty of the ET2020 Review), neither were they ranked. He also mentioned the need for a flexible implementation of deliverables at national level, which could be done through a ‘2 levels approach’ by having a) defined deliverables and b) list of possible options to achieve them. He highlighted that some deliverables were proposed to cater for short-term solutions while others (such as the ones on excellence and innovation in VET) had a more long-term perspective.
The discussions showed a general agreement on the reduction and content of the 8 deliverables as proposed in the note. The list seemed to cover all key areas which had emerged from the consultation process and stocktaking exercise. No further reduction of the list of possible future deliverables was considered necessary.

Some of the participants (Italy, Luxembourg, Cedefop, ETF) noted a different nature of proposed deliverables and proposed to further work on a presentation which could better capture the difference between thematic deliverables (linked particularly to employability) and horizontal or transversal deliverables (such as teachers and trainers, funding and governance). It was acknowledged that any attempt to structure the proposed deliverables and link them to strategic priorities is difficult before the finalisation of ET2020 Review.

In terms of prioritisation, the proposal for STDs should leave the flexibility to prioritise deliverables at national level (BE, LU, BusinessEurope) with links to Europe 2020 exercise, country specific recommendations and National Reform Programmes (Business Europe, UEAPME); it should also be linked to activities run under other processes, such as Small Business Act (UEAPME).

With the aim to make deliverables measurable and easier to monitor, an introduction of quantitative targets (possibly different from country to country) should be considered. At the same time the difficulty in finding reliable indicators was stressed. However, a creation of new benchmarks should be avoided (LU). A full use of the existing employability benchmark should be ensured (ETUC). Social partners suggested also a new target on proportion of work-based learning in all VET programmes (ETUC, BusinessEurope). Cedefop referred to the need to take countries’ different starting points into account. The lack of indicators and targets had made it difficult to establish baselines and to assess progress in the period 2011-2014. This would be an issue to consider in the next phase. In cooperation with Cedefop, the Commission will try to prepare proposals about the future monitoring, to be submitted to the DGVT meeting as examples.

There was a positive discussion on the 2 levels approach, possibly renaming policy options to suggestions and simplify the wording to better capture the flexibility in implementation of a given deliverable (LV, IT, LU). The Belgian Delegate proposed to move the EU level VET providers network to the European level STDs and in addition also not to have the tools spelled out as objectives, as they were also very difficult to monitor and were serving various purposes, but rather as policy options while, in the STDs, concentrate more on objectives (permeability, lifelong learning etc.). Italy suggested to move the European Alliance for Apprenticeships to the policy options.

Specific suggestions were made on the wording of some of the STDs, in particular on efficiency, governance and involvement of social partners, guidance, groups at risks, competences. UEAPME expressed the wish that monitoring transitions and feedback mechanisms would be strengthened. ETUC stressed the importance of permeability and notion of work-place learning in the CVET context. The Belgian Delegate asked the Commission to add definitions to the main terms used in the STDs, among others apprenticeship, work-based learning, key competences, basic skills, entrepreneurship.

The Chair proposed that further comments and suggestions from participants could be sent in writing by 19 September, in order to prepare a revised version of the document for an in depth discussion at the DGVT meeting. The chair asked all participants to liaise with their national colleagues attending the DGVT meeting in Rome, in order to ensure they are well informed about the conclusions of the Bureau and the feed-back that each country gave to the Bureau for ensuring consistency of the positions.
3. Events under the current and the future presidencies (DGVT meetings and conferences)

The Italian Presidency gave an overview of their events foreseen in October for which invitations had already been sent. DGVT meeting focusing on the definition of the new short term deliverables (STDs) under the Copenhagen process (to be embedded in the ET2020 Joint Report) and a conference on Youth guarantee, with the aim of bringing together Education policy makers with ESF Committee members and YG coordinators.

On the DGVT agenda, Ms Dana Bachmann pointed out that on ECVET time might not be sufficient to provide an overview of the Commission recommendations and therefore it would be maybe useful to organize an ad hoc meeting on the topic or discuss more at length later on.

The Belgian Delegate asked to ensure that there are short written reports from the DGVT workshops and enough time for rapporteurs to provide information in the plenary. On the ESF Conference he considered important to discuss what financial support is possible for mobility (for example for language learning). This could be included under one of the Conference workshops as mobility under Erasmus+ and EURES would be also analysed in the Conference, to explore the possibility of up-scaling into ESF mobility for learning and employment.

The Commission ensured that rapporteurs would be assisted by the Commission and Cedefop on their tasks and a report would be made available for each workshop.

The Latvian Delegate suggested to invite also youth stakeholders/policy makers to the Conference in Italy. The idea was noted by the Italian Presidency and the Commission.

The Latvian Delegates presented the themes of their Presidency and their future VET events: ET2020 new priorities for the next work cycle and strengthen the key role of education and training for growth and well-being, promote creativity, innovation and digital skills at school level, enhance cooperation in vocational education and training (links between education and labour market, innovation and how to get on board the world of work), explore further development of internationalisation in higher education; a DGVT meeting was foreseen on 20-21/4 and a Meeting of Ministers in charge of VET with European Social Partners and the Commission, on the new short term deliverables was planned on 22/6.

The Luxembourg Delegate expressed their intention during their Presidency of taking stock of the progress on Youth guarantees (one year after the upcoming IT conference), the role of Social partners in VET governance and quality arrangements and lifelong learning.

The Dutch Delegate announced their theme concerning skills for a lifetime, flexible solutions for LLL, the use of Erasmus+ and the mobility benchmark in VET (the events would be taking place in Amsterdam). Following request by EL, he also clarified that a link to adult learning might be made.

UEAPME asked if there was data available on mobility since this was important for enhancing employability. The Commission undertook to come back later bilaterally.

4. ACVT meeting on 4-5 December 2014

Following a suggestion in writing from BE, it was agreed to see later on if a presentation on the Cedefop publication 'Renewing VET provision - Understanding feedback mechanisms between initial VET and the labour market' would be helpful in the ACVT.

The Chair presented the draft agenda which was agreed by participants. She informed the meeting that additional topics might be added, depending on the developments of certain files
in the coming months. One addition could also be an update on the Europe2020 review, as the deadline for the on line consultation would expire in October.

Social partners agreed to provide examples from their members on use of ICT and new technologies in VET and AL, while trade unions highlighted that they would like to see more examples coming from the employers’ side (the McKinsey report was mentioned). Under the item concerning the EU Semester, the report of Business Europe ‘Labour market reforms and CSRs’ and of ETUC ‘Trade unions involvement on CSRs’ will be presented and sent in advance to all participants.

The Chair invited participants to share interesting information on their activities for the information note to the ACVT and ETUC replied they might propose a short text on one of their projects.

ETUC welcomed the discussion on the information note at the end of the meeting and asked if an update on the initiative on Standardization by DG ENTR would be presented. The Chair informed the meeting that for the moment DG ENTR was advancing but there were no further concrete developments to be discussed yet. A meeting with CEN might take place to clarify their contribution on the EASQ, upon request by the Belgian Delegate.

UEAPME asked clarifications about the agenda item on the EU Semester.

5. Feedback from past events (DGVTs, presidency conferences, ACVT meetings)

Because of time constraint agenda item 5 was not dealt with in details.

6. Establishing a new roadmap for the Copenhagen process – preparatory discussions

The Chair circulated the example of the roadmap established in 2010 in the framework of the Bruges Communiqué where the topics of the rotating Presidencies were linked to the short term deliverables. She mentioned the possibility of developing a detailed rolling agenda that will support implementation of the priorities at both National and European level for the future STDs, but preparations could only start during the Latvian presidency, after the adoption of the new set of ET 2020 priorities, including VET ones.

7. Any other business

Ms Marleen Voordeckers, from the ETF, presented the events to celebrate their 20 years between 18 and 21 November (Conferences on entrepreneurship and youth employment as well as celebrations at the margins of the Governing Board meeting).

Ms Mara Brugia, indicated that Cedefop will celebrate 40 years in 2015 in a joint event with EUROFOUND in the European Economic and Social Committee, then back to back with the Governing Board in June. An exhibition and a photo award for young people were also planned.

8. Closing

The next meeting of the enlarged ACVT Bureau should take place end of February 2015 or beginning of March.