

# **JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED?**

**An Analysis of the European Union's  
Intervention In VET in Eastern Europe**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the period before their accession to the European Union (EU) the formerly communist countries of eastern Europe were expected to reform their economic and social policies to satisfy EU-wide requirements and to become competitive in a market-orientated system. The countries were subject to pressure in the accession negotiations and eligible for aid to help them adapt. This thesis examines the influences that the EU brought to bear in the field of vocational education and training (VET) and investigates why the EU made the requirements that it did.

The thesis adopts a historical methodology, tracing the previous evolution of EU policy on VET on the one hand, and the state of VET under communism in eastern Europe on the other. It then examines the factors impinging on VET caused by the pressures of economic transition and the accession process. The treatment of VET during the accession negotiations and in the programme of aid are investigated in detail. Interviews with a number of key participants in the process shed light on the assumptions and reactions of the main stakeholders.

The thesis shows how the EU's interventions stemmed largely from its internal policies on VET rather than from a diagnosis of the problems of individual eastern countries. The EU increasingly applied to the East the emphasis on lifelong learning and the methods of negotiated target-setting that it had evolved to make an impact with existing member states. Various common European instruments for VET which emerged after 2002 also impinged on the East, though they had been presaged by a distinctive approach to curriculum design which featured in aid projects in the East.

At the level of specific policy areas, the thesis findings tend to support a neo-functionalist interpretation of what drives integration within the EU.

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

[Signed] John West 30 November 2014.....

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PERHAPS YOU CAN TELL ME HOW ALL THIS STARTED?

#### Introduction, Questions, Scope and Structure

I would like to be able to report that there had been snow on my boots as I entered the office of the Director of the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development in Bucharest in early January 2005. But the big fall of snow that year came a couple of weeks later, making the city's streets difficult to get round on foot and lengthening my thirty minute walk to and from the office where our project was located.

The Centre's office in Spiru Haret street, a couple of hundred yards from the Athena Palace hotel where spies had mingled in the cold war, had presented a forbidding aspect as I entered it with the leader of the project which I had joined the day before. The cavernous entrance hall was mired in gloom, lit only by a single dim bulb. I could vaguely make out the office of a concierge to one side, but we were not challenged as we passed through and up the broad, stone stairway to the first floor. A little light penetrated here, sufficient to show the peeling walls of the corridor. Dinginess and shabbiness were the overriding impressions.

However passing through a modest doorway into the wing occupied by the National Centre revealed a cheerier prospect. There were carpets, light and warmth, and a distinct bustle. Indeed the place was overflowing with paper; files had outgrown the filing cabinets and were stacked in every spare space in the offices as well as in the corridors.

It became apparent that my introduction to the Director was neither a courtesy call, nor an occasion on which advice from me was expected. Rather I was clearly being examined to see whether I was likely to be suitable as the new 'Key Expert in National Qualifications Frameworks', as my job title was rather clumsily styled. This was curious as I already had a contract to serve in this capacity, but it transpired that my predecessor had been found wanting in some mysterious respect and it was judged that it would be as well if I passed muster at the earliest possible occasion.

In fact I was not overly worried by the examination. I had served in the British Civil Service for over 20 years and most of my career had been concerned with vocational education and training. I had been on the team that developed National Vocational Qualifications in the 1980s, and five years before this interview I had been, for a number of years, the Department of Employment and Education's lead policy person on vocational qualifications. I was not sure whether the UK had invented the idea of a qualifications framework, but it was certainly one of the earliest proponents of the notion. What is more, the examination in Spiru Haret was not a 'make or break' moment for me. I had accepted the position offered to me by IMC, the consultancy firm which was engaged to run the project,<sup>\*</sup> rather on the spur of the moment, as a chance to travel and to run alongside the other advisory activities that I had developed in the UK after leaving the Department three years earlier. In short, if they didn't want me I would not have worried too much about taking the next plane home.

However, I was rather thrown when in the course of this first interview – when I was explaining my previous dealings with the English Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) – the Director asked me: "Do you know Mike Coles?" As a matter of fact I did, and said that I had last seen him only a month before in a bar in Mexico. This seemed a very satisfactory reply, and I was then treated to a rapid series of views on the papers Mike and his colleague Tim Oates (both QCA officials) had written exploring the possibility of a European Qualifications Framework (Coles and Oates, 2005) – a treatise I must confess (but didn't on this occasion) I had not read from cover to cover.

At the end of the interview I remembered, just in time, the golden rule for any consultant; to establish what it is that the client wants. Despite reams of material on the background to Romania's vocational education and training system, the project, its tasks and the duties of its various members, it was not entirely clear to me just why they should want a national qualifications framework, let alone an English person to advise them on it. "What do you want in terms of qualifications?" was the best I could do at the time. "We want European qualifications" was the answer.

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<sup>\*</sup> For the arrangements under which projects were run see page 175.



Over the next few days I pondered this response. I read about, and talked to people about, the reforms that had been taking place in Romania's VET system. Modules, occupational standards, competencies, standard-setting industry bodies all – rather to my surprise – featured in the landscape. This looked familiar to someone from the UK!

I also learned about Romania's educational institutions: the *Bacalaureat* examination at the end of secondary education, the various types of upper secondary *Liceu*, and the vocationally oriented *Școala de Arte și Meserii*. The evocations of the French Baccalauréat, Lycées and Écoles d'Arts et Métiers were surely due to more than just the common Latin roots of the two languages.

A number of questions formed in my mind. Why did the Romanians want a national qualifications framework? Why was the European Union (which was paying my wages) anxious to help them develop one? Did Romania not already have a qualifications framework (there clearly were different grades and types of qualification, most of them of long standing)? By 'European', did they aspire to being like any particular European country – if so which one – or were they keen to adhere to some kind of common strand of 'European-ness' which it was my job to discern; or again was there an EU policy on vocational qualifications which it was my duty to promote? If the latter, where did it come from, because in all my years in senior positions in VET in the UK, I had never heard of such a policy.

It was these kinds of questions that led, some four years later and after further experience in Croatia and Serbia as well as on assignments with the OECD, that I decided to investigate the origins and nature of the European Union's (EU) interventions on vocational education and training in eastern Europe, using the vehicle of a PhD to do so.

## **Context**

Some background is needed to understand why I was asked to attend that meeting in Spiru Haret Street. Like other eastern European countries Romania had, since soon after the second world war, been under communist government. Most of these countries had also been under the sway of the Soviet Union, economically and militarily. In 1989 and 1990,

through a dramatic series of popular revolutions, most of the countries\* had replaced communism with other forms of, more or less, democratic government and progressively subscribed to a free-market economic system. These moves were welcomed and materially supported by the EU. While these political and economic transitions were under way the countries made applications to join the Union, which most achieved in 2004.

The EU's support programme covered a large range of topics, including education, training and employment. Similarly the negotiations for accession to the EU involved steps to align each country's internal policies and institutions with the practices laid down in the various treaties, directives and decisions of the EU, which also covered aspects of domestic education, training and employment policy.

### **Previous studies in the field**

I do not believe that the topic of the EU's policy on VET in eastern Europe has been thoroughly addressed before, at least in the English language. Having said that, there has been a considerable, and increasing, academic focus on issues which have a bearing on the matter.

Since the late 1990s there has been a growth in a distinct school of academic commentary which has addressed the topic of 'globalization' in an education context, particularly with regard to the role of international organizations (including the EU) in stimulating convergent practice. This school (which has a dedicated journal in *Globalisation, Societies and Education*) has two strands, which sometimes overlap, but which can be usefully distinguished. The first focuses on new 'spaces' in education policy which it is claimed is no longer confined to national borders (Lawn and Grek, 2012; Lawn and Nóvoa, 2002; Robertson and Dale, 2008). There are also new forms of governance (Dale and Robertson, 2006), not only through the establishment of transnational expert groups (Normand,

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\* The trajectory for the countries of the former Yugoslavia were somewhat different. By the late 1980s, after the death of Tito in 1980, the system could scarcely be called communist. But from the early 1990s, a series of former republics of Yugoslavia split off from Serbia, the remaining Yugoslav republic, in most cases with concomitant wars, including the departure of Kosovo, a province of the Serbian Republic, to be administered by the UN.

2010; Robert, 2012), but importantly through the use of comparative data and peer review to stimulate convergence towards improved educational outcomes (Ozga et al., 2011). This first strand can be seen to align with the view of Castells (2010) that the EU is the first 'network state', constituted out of a series of projects, policies, information flows and groupings of people, rather than an incipient 'super-state' which replicates the nation state on a larger or federated basis.\* While Castells considers that there is so far something of a void in terms of a distinct European identity shared by its citizens, other authors with an educational background claim to be able to spot an emerging one shaped by a stress on individual responsibility for lifelong learning and the development of personal capacities including the key process skills which lead to employability (Stoera and Magalhães, 2004).

Rather than the formation of a new common educational policy, modes of governance and possibly joint identity, the second strand within this school considers that international organizations in general, and the EU in particular, have acted as vehicles for the transmission of 'neo-liberal' values stemming from Anglo-American political ideas of the 1980s. This – allegedly – has led to the admirable humanistic sentiments of UNESCO's concept of lifelong education (Faure, 1972) being corrupted into EU notions of lifelong learning which stress only instrumental employability (Borg and Mayo, 2005). In the field of education and training there is a distinct "...coincidence of the Commission's agendas and the interests of international capital..." (Sultana, 2002, p.121). The influence of global capital manifests itself not so much through direct representation, but through the emergence of a "dominant educational discourse" which links education to economic growth (Moutsios, 2010, p.121), or even through the increasing use of the English language itself (Brockmann, Clarke and Winch, 2011; Gough, 2014). At the same time, a cult of 'performativity' through internationally comparable statistics "... constitute[s] an emergent

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\* As Castells himself hints, the idea of units of governance which do not align with clear geographical and political boundaries, but rather with shared projects, beliefs and modes of action which are limited in scope and which allow participants to join other groupings, is hardly new in Europe. The Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Order of the Teutonic Knights, the Hanseatic League, the various churches and monastic orders, as well as modern examples such as *Comecon/Warsaw Pact* and NATO, all have these characteristics, though the EU could perhaps be represented as a particularly intense and institutionalized constellation of such arrangements.

global education policy field existing as an imaginary above nations” (Ozga and Lingard, 2007, p.77), and previously firmly public sector education services are subject to ‘managerialism’ and ‘marketization’ (Ball, 2007; Grek and Rinne, 2011). Much of this literature is unashamedly polemical: for example, Taylor et al. start their work by “...making our own commitment to democracy and social justice explicit” (1997, p.viii), while Rizvi and Lingard conclude that “a new social imaginary is necessary to frame education policy in the wake of the egregious failures of neoliberalism” (2009, p.202). Avis (2012) considers that VET policy “constitute[s] a site of struggle” against a “neoliberal hegemony” – an enterprise which “needs to be set within a rigorously anti-capitalist stance” (pp.8-9).\*

Despite the amount of literature from the ‘globalization’ school, and perhaps surprisingly in view of the apparent attractiveness of the interaction between the EU and the new East as a case study of the transmission of educational ideas through the agency of an international organization, there is little within this school about eastern Europe during the accession period.

There are, of course, less theory-laden accounts of EU policy on education and training. For example Ertl (2006) gives a readable overview of the evolution of this policy from the outset. A very thorough, though wholly uncritical, account is contained in the EU’s official history of its education policy (European Commission, 2006b). However neither work deals with the enlargement of the Community, still less with the EU’s promotion of VET through its aid programmes for eastern Europe.

There have been a number of articles concerning VET in individual eastern European countries in the *European Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, published by CEDEFOP,<sup>†</sup> but these are in the main country-specific and often concerned only with a particular aspect of VET. They do not tell the story of the EU’s interventions as a whole. While an edited collection by Strietska-Ilina (2007a) carries useful responses from writers in

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\*This school has a very distinctive terminology – ‘hegemony’, ‘struggles’, the ‘unmasking’ of deceptively attractive doctrines, problems frequently described as ‘crises’, ‘imaginary’ (curiously used as a noun, connoting a commonly held societal concept), ‘emergent’ almost invariably used in favour of the much more common ‘emerging’, ‘performativity’ *etc.* For those that lay such stress on the role of discourse (another favourite) in framing thought, such idiosyncratic usages must be trying to say something.

<sup>†</sup> European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. See Glossary.

the 'new member states' to various EU education and training policies, it does not describe or explain the genesis of those policies, let alone attempt to present them as a coherent whole.

There is, of course, a considerable literature about the policy and process of EU enlargement, for example Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005), but little on the specific case of education and training. There is also a sizeable literature about the challenges of economic transition in the new member states, including some material on the specific challenges facing VET (for example, Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005), these do not seek to describe or evaluate the role of the EU in helping candidates for accession to address these challenges.

The European Training Foundation published a range of detailed studies of VET in the accession countries in the early 2000s. They do not, of themselves, give an account of the policies of the EU in relation to these countries, though in Chapter Eight I shall suggest that material from them can be used to identify what the main concerns of the EU were.

The work which probably comes closest to the field addressed here, is Jean-Raymond Masson's account of the support policies of the EU in VET in candidate countries (Masson, 2003). The description of EU policies is very helpful and we shall make full use of it. However it is confined to a single chapter, deals largely with the support instruments (rather than the accession negotiations) and comes to an end in 2002, before the rolling out of the EU's *Copenhagen* process which I shall argue amounted to a new direction in influence.

### **Research questions**

In framing research one needs to be rather more precise than the initial barrage of questions which assailed me in that first week in Bucharest. For the purposes of my research I formulated the following:

- In what ways did the EU intend to influence VET in eastern Europe?
- Why did it select these particular items?
- How did it pursue these aims?
- What explains the approach that was taken by the EU?

- How influential was the EU in changing VET policies in the countries concerned?

The last question needs a little qualification. It would have been very attractive to be able to gauge the influence and effectiveness of the EU's policies on the subsequent structures and performance of the VET systems in the eastern European countries. However, this would have required a longer and wider perspective than I could achieve. It is not so long since accession took place, and any thorough examination of effects would have involved an in-depth country-by-country investigation. However this study will record and discuss the more obvious and immediate forms of EU impact on the East.

### **Scope**

Clearly we need to define what we mean by eastern Europe and what we mean by vocational education and training. Both terms can be interpreted in different ways.

Eastern Europe is a fluid geographical and political term. Geographically eastern Europe stretches from the Urals in the east to somewhere around the Vistula in modern-day Poland and the eastern rim of the Carpathian mountains in the west; the Balkan peninsula is perhaps something rather separate. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia generally describe themselves as central, rather than eastern European. Some Romanians would describe their country as belonging to the Balkans geographically. Finland sees itself as firmly Nordic rather than eastern European. Politically one tends to think of eastern Europe as the former European states of the Warsaw Pact other than the Soviet Union itself, though such a definition would rule out the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania which were part of the Soviet Union proper until 1991, as were the Ukraine and Moldova which surely must be regarded as eastern European. This definition would also rule out the states which were formed in the 1990s from the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia which was not a member of the Warsaw Pact, though it had a communist government until the early 1980s. In this study, however, the definition of eastern Europe is pragmatic – it is concerned with those European states which in the 1970s fell under a communist form of government and which today have either

joined or have been accepted as potential candidates for entry to the European Union – excepting the former German Democratic Republic (which is a special case, having ceased to exist as a separate nation). The study does not aim to cover the western Balkan states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, all of which are decidedly Balkan, and none of which either fell under the Warsaw Pact or have yet joined the EU.

So we are concerned with the following twelve countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (collectively known as the Baltic States), Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria.

Similarly vocational education and training (VET) is a wide concept, being used differently by different commentators (Bosch and Charest, 2010; Grubb and Ryan, 1999). In its wider usages it covers any curriculum content in school which aims to prepare for the labour market, much of higher education, a great deal of formal education undertaken by adults together with training conducted within firms. For the purposes of this study VET for young people (sometimes referred to as initial VET – IVET) is intended to connote programmes within secondary education which prepare for specific roles in the labour market as well as apprenticeships, and VET for adults (sometimes referred to as continuing VET – CVET) is intended to connote specific programmes and state-supported interventions for those over the age of 21 to train or retrain for labour market roles. The study will not cover in any depth the important areas of VET within higher education, training within firms undertaken without state intervention, or wider aspects of lifelong learning except inasmuch as they impact on the more formal structures. The reason for this focus on public, rather than private, provision of VET is simply that the EU, as a body which largely deals with and through national governments, is more concerned with public policies and processes than with attempting itself directly to influence the private sphere.

In terms of period, the thesis is primarily concerned with the time from the fall of communism in 1989-91 and the accession of the last of the initial ten eastern candidates at the beginning of 2007, though some later material relevant to Croatia (which joined in 2013) and Serbia (which has yet to join)

is included, and a brief discussion of the post-accession effects is made in the final chapter.

Though naturally the story of the interaction between the EU and eastern countries continued after accession, cutting off the story at this point is logical. After accession the lever of conditionality (reform in exchange for membership) disappeared, as did the EU's direction of the aid programmes for VET (the new member states instead had access to the EU's normal structural funds on the same basis as existing members). Though the EU continued to monitor, and no doubt influence, VET practices in the eastern countries after this point, it did so in the same way as for all member states. In short, after accession the countries no longer were in any way distinctive in official EU terms, and the nature of their story and that of the EU changes.

## **Structure**

The next chapter concerns a rationale for the methodology chosen, and an introduction to the framework used for examining the driving forces behind the EU. Thereafter the study is set out as follows:

- Chapters Three and Four deal with separate starting points as they affect our story – the legacy of communism on the one hand and the genesis of VET policies within the EU on the other;
- Chapters Five and Six deal with the implications for VET in the two main events that occurred after the EU and eastern Europe engaged with each other in the 1990s; the shock of economic transition, and – overlapping with this – the process of accession to the EU;
- Chapter Seven summarizes the main ideas relevant to VET which arose from the historical legacy and the reactions to it;
- Chapters Eight and Nine then deal in detail with the particular instruments used by the EU to influence VET in eastern Europe – the pressures brought to bear on VET in the negotiations for accession, and the EU-funded support programme which aimed to develop VET in the East;



- Chapter Ten presents perspectives of a range of people from various countries who participated in one way or another in the processes we have described.

The final chapter presents the conclusions of the study, reflects on the methodology and outlines areas which might be of interest for further study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HOW CAN WE FIND OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON?

#### Concepts, Methodology and Methods

##### Introduction

How do we investigate the EU's approach to VET in the East? We need some framework for interpreting what was taking place, an acceptable system of investigation, and particular means for extracting relevant information. This chapter lays out the rationale, in turn, for the conceptual framework, methodology and methods used.

##### A Conceptual Framework

We are dealing here with the actions of a supranational organization (the EU) in supporting and eventually admitting to its membership a series of countries, and specifically in seeking to influence the arrangements for vocational education and training in those countries. In this context a number of interpretative frameworks are possible.

One could see this as an exercise in international relations – attempts by one country, or in this case a group of countries, to influence other countries such as to further the interests of the influencer(s). That is patently something of what was going on, but such an interpretation would leave open the important issue of whether the EU can be seen as a 'country' capable of taking international initiatives, or whether it should more correctly be seen as a collection of countries acting in their several interests and co-operating on a voluntary basis.

Again, one could view the EU's interest in promoting the development of VET in the East as an example of international aid. Certainly aid for development was a feature, but this was only one strand – there was also the question of the conditions for accession and the progressive incorporation of personnel from the East into EU networks.

Similarly 'policy borrowing' in the field of vocational education has for many years been the topic of research and comment (Finegold, McFarland and Richardson, 1993; Phillips and Ochs, 2003); there is no doubt, as we shall

discover, that a certain amount of borrowing went on, both deliberately and inadvertently. However this was far from the whole story and if we are dealing – as we are – with the EU's policy rather than the policies of the various eastern European countries, then borrowing by the EU from the existing member states was not a large feature; indeed it was in many ways notable by its absence.

A further possibility would be interpret the interaction as one of the deployment of different types of influence. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005b) have researched the process of enlargement of the EU in different policy areas (though not in education or VET). They see three different modes of influence: 'conditionality' (the need for new states to abide by existing EC law); lesson-drawing (the desire on the part of states to solve their problems by taking solutions from other countries), and 'social learning' (the desire to join in and co-operate with others). We shall re-visit this framework during the course of this thesis, but it is essentially an examination of *process* – what modes of influencing were used and were most effective – rather than seeking to explain why the *policy* took the form that it did.

On reflection it seems reasonable to see the EU's policies, both towards VET and towards the issue of the enlargement of the Community, in the light of a more general view of how EU policies and institutions develop. A number of different interpretations, under the general description of 'European Integration Theory', have been put forward over the years to explain the process of policy development at the EU level, treating the EU as a very particular case, without obvious parallels in other international organizations. There are a large number of these theories – Wiener and Diez (2009) discuss eleven, ranging from federalism to feminism. Not all of these theories purport to explain all dimensions of the EU's development, and there is a certain amount of overlap between some of them. However, the following four would seem both to represent a useful contrast to each other and to have implications for the way policy on VET has been arrived at. First we look briefly at each of the four, and then we consider what it might have to say about VET.

'Neo-functionalism': early functionalist theories held that the post-war transnational organizations designed to deal with particular issues (*eg.* trade, international diplomacy, finance *etc.*) offered the prospect of

superseding the nation-state and heralded a more rational world order, as interest groups addressed themselves to the new institutions, rather than their national governments, according to the functions that they were interested in (Mitrany, 1944). Building on this, academic theorists of the initial formation of the EU added elements explaining why such institutions appeared to take on a life of their own and grow in significance, as happened in the expansion of institutions in the 1950s from the European Coal and Steel Community to the European Economic Community (Haas, 1968; Lindberg, 1963). Though the stagnation of the development of the Community in the 1960s and 1970s led many (including Haas) to reject the notion of continuous and progressive integration which was implicit in the theory, it was revived in the 1990s when it became apparent that the EU was gaining new functions and new members (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz, 1998).

Neo-functionalism is based on the ideas of rational actors seeking to advance their interests through the new transnational institutions, the importance of interest groups and elites who progressively associate themselves on a transnational basis, and the reinforcing effects from within EU institutions (eg. the Commission) which develop a distinctive mission to enhance their own role, thus adding impetus to further integration. The important neo-functionalist concept of 'spillover' accounts for a self-reinforcing dynamic as integration in one field (eg. the mobility of labour) inevitably leads to pressure for integration in others (eg. common immigration and asylum policies, moves towards European citizenship). Neo-functionalism predicts gradualist, technocratic, path-dependent and perhaps accidental pathways to integration. The founding father of the EU, Jean Monnet, was arguably in this camp, as he believed in progressive integration area by area:

The new method of action developed in Europe replaces the efforts at domination of nation states by a constant process of collective adaptation to new conditions, a chain reaction, a ferment where one change induces another. (Monnet, 2003)

'Liberal inter-governmentalism', in contrast to neo-functionalism, holds that the governments of member states (rather than EU officials, elites or interest groups) are the main actors, and that the process of European integration is entirely dependent on the extent to which powerful states are prepared to encourage or countenance it. States form their preferences

through their own internal political processes, bargain with each other to reach a policy solution and, where it is in their interests to have a durable inter-governmental arrangement, erect supranational institutions to administer the mutually agreed solution and to enforce compliance with it. Thus the EU is no different in principle to other supranational organizations (such as the United Nations or trade bodies) erected through international agreement – the degree, direction and speed of integration is explicable by the sum of the preferences of its constituents factored by their relative bargaining power.\*

Though it is often contrasted with neo-functionalism, liberal inter-governmentalism shares with it the belief that the various actors (in this case the member states) are acting rationally. Milward (1992) considered that European integration and the formation of supranational institutions were:

... not the supersession of the nation-state by another form of governance ... but [the supranational institutions were] the creation of European nation-states themselves for their own purposes, an act of national will. (p.18)

Though the Community was in fact the servant rather than the master of the various member states, it was sometimes convenient for a national government to blame the EU “for unpopular policies which were also those of the government itself, and, when it suited the mood, caricatured as a technocratic dictatorship trampling the rights of [national citizens] underfoot” (p.116). *Contra* the neo-functionalists, there is nothing at all inevitable about ‘ever closer union’.

Moravcsik (1998) analyzed major ‘turning points’ in the development of the EU (such as the creation of the Single Economic Area) and concluded in each case that the outcome was the rational outcome of a bargaining process undertaken by states with varying degrees of (primarily commercial) interest and negotiating power. Liberal inter-governmentalism has been criticized for confining its explanations to a relatively limited number of (admittedly important) *démarches*, for discounting the steady incremental process of day-to-day decision-making, and for failing to recognize that EU institutions depart from their original, inter-

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\* This inter-governmental theory is labelled ‘liberal’ in contrast to ‘realist’ because it asserts that countries’ preferences are set through their internal political processes rather than purely by their geo-political position.

governmentally agreed, missions. Its proponents, however, insist that such effects are relatively weak, and reversible by national governments acting in consort (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2009).

Constructivists place less emphasis on purely rational behaviour – whether the interaction of groups acting in their own interests (central to the neo-functional position), or the outcome of bargaining between nation-states committed to promoting their individual interests. Constructivists hold that European institutions are not merely the reflection of the intentions of those that created them, or those that work in them, but themselves influence those actors in new ways. A belief that people not only create, but also are shaped by the institutions that they take part – that social ways of behaving of themselves constitute the ideas of meaning held by individuals – stems from a wide range of disciplines, including the philosophy of Heidegger, the anthropological work of Lévi-Strauss and the sociology of Giddens (Crotty, 1998). Following the import of these ideas into theories of international relations (Adler, 1997), Checkel (1999) drew attention to the need to supplement concepts of rational actors developing (or hindering) European integration with “...a more sociological understanding of institutions that stresses their interest- and identity-forming roles” (p.545).

Thus the social constructivist point of view asserts that the very creation of the EU – including its institutions, its conventions of how states should behave, its formal meetings of state representatives, recognized interests, experts, and informal groupings – has led all these actors to adopt new norms and attitudes and so influences their future actions. By such a process a genuinely new and distinctively ‘European’ entity is constructed, culminating eventually in a widespread common sense of identity.

We may therefore see in the constructivist camp that strand of commentary on education in the EU context described on page 10 which points to a new ‘space’ in educational policy-making and practice created by, and as a result of the EU, with pan-European instruments such as qualification frameworks, common educational patterns such as *Bologna* in higher education, governance through benchmarking and peer pressure and the creation of networks of experts from different countries as well as the day-to-day interchange of teachers and students, each contributing to a distinctively European style of education policy which cannot be accounted

for by either the competing interests of different states or the machinations of a central bureaucracy.

Finally there are a range of interpretations which emphasise economic drivers for increased European integration. These assert the essential economic nature of the EU and view it as an arrangement which promotes economic growth and/or industrial/commercial interests. Of course each of the three theories outlined so far have their economic dimensions – neo-functionalists would not deny that much of the impetus of interest groups is economic, Milward was an economic historian and Moravcsik, as we have seen, stressed commercial advantage as an important motivation for the bargaining between states which characterizes liberal inter-governmentalism. And constructivists would concede that many of the ostensible motivations which bring European actors together can be interpreted as having economic or commercial origins. However those claiming a primacy for economic factors see these as providing a continuous force for integration, with the instruments represented in the other theories merely as the means through which the economic imperative plays itself out. An early proponent of this point of view was Bela Balassa (1961) who provided a theoretical economic explanation for increasing EU integration and why it made sense to extend ‘co-ordination’ across different sectors, including monetary and fiscal policy.

While there are many strands within this grouping, we may highlight two contrasting ones. First there is the concept that there are different ‘varieties of capitalism’ (Hall and Soskice, 2001) representing different settlements whereby arrangements are made in different societies to promote trade and to counter or balance the otherwise unacceptable effects of economic growth. Fioretos (2001) uses this framework to explain how different nations (in this case Britain and Germany during the *Maastricht* negotiations) press for different balances between trade, corporate regulation and welfare at the European level.

A more conspiratorial interpretation is given by Cafruny and Ryne (2009), who claim that EU institutions merely reflect power structures elsewhere:

Supranational institutions and ideas have not been, in themselves, the most important factors driving European integration. Rather they have played a decisive role only to the extent that they have successfully articulated the interests

and strategies of the dominant national, regional and transatlantic social forces. (p.237)

This stance is taken further in the second strand of the 'globalization' school of writers on EU education matters mentioned on page 11. Drawing on elements of Gramscian Marxism, 'critical' theory from the *Frankfurt* school, and sociology they hold that far from opening up the interesting and possibly benevolent new 'spaces' identified by the social constructivists, the EU has become – whether wittingly or unwittingly – the agent of promoting a relentlessly 'neo-liberal' viewpoint stemming from the 'Washington Consensus' of the early 1990s and, particularly, the politics of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (Klees, 2008). This neo-liberal sentiment has become so pervasive ('hegemonic'), that it has infected the very language ('discourse') and frame of thinking ('imaginary') of the EU – a syndrome to which, it is claimed, international organizations are particularly vulnerable. These international organizations then use their influence (in the case of the EU, a very considerable influence) to promote this new orthodoxy amongst its member states, to the advantage of international capitalist interests and to the detriment of workers. Because of the patent unacceptability of this neo-liberal doctrine to the ordinary populations of countries, the governing elites have disguised ('masked') it in a discourse of emancipation (eg. freedom of choice), while claiming at the same time that 'there is no alternative.' These devices have been sufficiently effective to enable governments espousing these doctrines to be repeatedly elected in the various European countries and to continue to countenance the neo-liberal agenda of the EU. The task of academics of this school, who pursue 'social justice', is to expose ('unmask') such deceptions.

The principal hallmarks of this type of neo-liberalism\* are a belief in the effectiveness of markets (rather than the state or corporatist arrangements) in the allocation of resources, whether private or public, the promotion of unfettered free trade, the elimination of regulation so far as possible consistent with orderly markets, the reduction of public expenditure to allow more resources in the private sector, a transfer of previously public functions to the private sector with a more active management, through

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\* Both Klees (2008) and Ball (2008), as subscribers to this school, give concise descriptions of the main tenets of neoliberalism and their implications for education policies.



internal competition, contracts and explicit targets, of those functions which perform need to remain within the public sector ('new public management'). In the sphere of VET the educational commentators from this school associate the neo-liberal agenda with attempts to introduce a "truncated and instrumentalised notion of knowledge" which is "anti-educative" (Avis, 2012, p.7), and pressures leading to "...education being conceived of mainly in vocational terms" (Borg and Mayo, 2005, p.209).

It is, of course, possible to combine elements of these theories of integration, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example Anderson (2009) offers something of a 'mix and match' combination seeing the EU at different times as:

- a project favoured by elites (both nationally and within the EU institutions), who take care not to expose it to any popular mandate, but who do not have any very clear end-view beyond the shared view that integration is desirable. One can see the commonality with neo-functionalism here;
- a geo-political device conceived both as a way to prevent further war in Europe (particularly to contain a potentially resurgent Germany), and to counter the Soviet bloc during the cold war. In these aims the EU was inextricably linked to (and supported by) the USA. Here we see an inter-governmentalist interpretation, 'realist' perhaps rather than 'liberal';
- the EU as a vehicle for promoting free-trade economic relations, with this economic stance being put beyond the democratic sphere of individual nation states. According to Anderson this aspect has increased over time; originally the EU was conceived by Monnet as being "capable, not simply of freeing factors of production across unified markets, but [also] of macro-economic intervention and social redistribution" (p.540). However, these latter roles have atrophied leaving the EU primarily as a free-trade zone wedded to the freedom of capital within it. Here Anderson clearly views the EU as a particular type of political economy.

One can agree or not with Anderson's interpretations, but the idea that the EU owes its nature to a number of different drivers, and that the balance between them shifts over time, is worth bearing in mind.

What kinds of approach to VET in eastern Europe might be expected under each of these different conceptions? If the neo-functionalist interpretation is correct, one would expect the EU to have been feeling its way gradually to a policy on VET, driven largely by the Commission and other EU agencies aiming to increase their sphere of influence. VET policy would often be a 'spillover' from other policy areas more central to the EU's interests, and the policy in the East would in turn be largely derived from VET policies adopted in respect of the established member states. Interventions would have a technocratic flavour, and there would be an attempt to replicate in the East the apolitical structures developed in the existing EU.

On the other hand if liberal inter-governmentalism were the dominant mode of operation, one would expect the eastern countries to have actively bargained over the VET policies they were expected to adopt, and the EU interventions to be traceable to some jointly agreed consensus amongst the established member states, perhaps reflecting some acceptable mixture of national policies. On the ground one might expect the western countries to be trying to influence the new members to adopt their particular VET models, through consultancy and marketing, with the central EU agencies holding the ring between them.

A social constructivist model would predict that the primary effect of policy on VET in the East would be the transfer – through mutual exchanges and networks – of a distinctive 'European' approach to VET initially formed through some kind of synthesis of practices in the older member states. One might expect this to have emerged gradually through transnational co-operation facilitated, but not controlled, by the central EU agencies. The East would be keen to participate in networks and to subscribe to the new practices, with its influence on them growing.

Finally an interpretation based on the primacy of economic factors as the motor for EU integration would lead one to expect enlargement to the East to be driven largely by economic interests – the prospects of new sources of labour and fruitful locations for investment, and new consumer markets. One would expect major firms to take an active interest in publicly funded efforts for workforce development. On the 'varieties of capitalism' reading, one might expect some competition of models between the more liberal and the more corporatist approaches, with a distinctive accommodation

being developed reflecting the emerging balance of interests in the East. On the 'neo-liberal globalization' school's thesis, the EU would stress the role of VET rather than general education, with an instrumental bias in favour of satisfying the immediate needs of footloose industry, rather than developing the longer term human resources of the countries in question. There would be an emphasis on the economic rationale for VET – for example for increased productivity, stress on vocationally-orientated lifelong learning, and labour mobility – albeit 'masked' by an appealing rhetoric. One might also expect private sector forms of VET to be favoured, and/or for market mechanisms such as competitive tendering, comparable performance data, vouchers *etc.* to be introduced within the public education sector.

At certain points in what follows we shall take stock of which – if any – of the interpretations outlined here are exemplified in the events described.

### **Methodology**

Different approaches to investigation of the topic were clearly possible. It would have been possible to approach it through an examination of current VET practices in eastern Europe and to attempt to establish the extent to which they derived from interventions by the EU. A series of case studies could have been undertaken, focussing on developments which were sponsored by the EU (such as the Romanian project on which I was engaged); one could have sought to exemplify and explain whether the selected initiatives had taken root and what the determinants of sustainability seemed to be. Indeed a case study method appears to be favoured by theorists of European integration; it was used by both Milward and Anderson and in their compendium of approaches to integration theory Wiener and Diez (2009) invite the proponents of each alternative theory to address specific policy cases to test the extent to which their approach does, or does not, apply. In the field of VET in eastern Europe, Baumgartl, Strietska-Ilina and Schaumberger (2004) use a case study methodology to describe a range of EU-sponsored interventions in certain countries.

However this kind of approach has limitations. First, it could not easily address a number of the research questions. While, admittedly, a case study approach might be able to give some in-depth context to the

particular methods the EU used in individual countries, and – supposing sufficient time had elapsed – perhaps enable one to track some of the country-specific effects, it could not directly shed light on the underlying rationale for the EU's interventions. One would need to retrospectively impute, from case study observations, what the EU's intentions were, and why the interventions took the form that they did. So while case studies might be effective in terms of the third and fifth research questions (page 13), they could only be an indirect source of information about the other three, which concern the motivations of the EU.

Moreover a selection of case studies which reflect EU interventions would suffer from the drawback that developments in VET which took place as a result of forces other than specific EU initiatives would tend not to come under examination. As we shall see the EU's VET policy spanned a large number of fields (*eg.* initial VET, continuing VET, lifelong learning, ways of framing the vocational curriculum, the nature of qualifications, the promotion of social partnership, active labour market measures *etc.*), not all of which were reflected in specific development projects. A focus on specific EU interventions might therefore run the risk both of associating too many VET developments with EU support, and of missing wider influences of the EU, outside particular projects.

Furthermore, from the practical point of view, the limitations of time and resources for doctoral research meant only a limited number of highly selective case studies could have been undertaken; as there are twelve countries in scope to this study, no reasonable attempt could be made to encompass the entire region of eastern Europe. Therefore one would need to impute EU motivations, not only retrospectively, but also on the basis of two or three cases, which might have been atypical. Further, in-depth examination of the circumstances in a particular country would not have been feasible without access to local documentation and individuals. It would have been unrealistic and unrepresentative to have relied on those sources which were in the English language, and – for me – unaffordable to have arranged for translation and interpretation. And finally, as we have noted, there are already a number of case studies; I have drawn on them in the course of this thesis.

Instead of attempting to trace eastern VET practices to the influence of the EU, this study adopts a methodology of historical investigation combined

with a perspective of policy analysis, in tracking the evolution of VET policy both in the 'old' EU itself and in the context of its dealings with the eastern countries. A historical approach allows a wide range of factors to be considered including politics, personalities, economic events and social change; "...history is both a craft and an art, drawing on formal research conventions yet embracing all interpretative traditions" (McCulloch and Richardson, 2000, p.9).

This approach enables us to trace the evolution of the EU's VET policy for eastern Europe, examining how it related to – or diverged from – the policy it had with respect to the established member states. It also allows us to chart the interaction of that policy with the changing circumstances of the countries, and the perceptions of them. However, it must be admitted that the ambition – embraced here – to cover policy towards all of the countries, and over a fifteen year period, does mean that the peculiarities of individual countries, and the recognition by the EU of these (where this happened), can only be touched upon. And, and has been mentioned, the limited amount of country-specific context, together with the fact that the study finishes at the point of accession for the majority of countries, does mean that evidence of the effects of the EU's intervention is restricted; although certain common effects are noted (in the final chapter), the impact of the EU's interventions will have impacted differently in different countries and no doubt continue to reverberate until the present.

### History

Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) characterize what they term 'comparative historical enquiry' as being "fundamentally concerned with the explanation and the identification of cause and configurations that produce major outcomes of interest" (p.11). The contribution of a historical approach is that it allows for "the unfolding of processes over time. ...Comparative historical analysts incorporate considerations of the temporal structural of events in their explanations" (p.12).

With one important caveat, to which I shall return, this is the approach adopted here. The thesis is structured to track the 'unfolding' of a number of processes – the development of EU VET policy in general, the effects of economic transition for the eastern countries, the pressures arising through

the negotiations on accession, and the impact of the EU's aid programme for VET – and to identify the interactions that each had (or failed to have) with the other at different times.

As Mahoney and Rueschemeyer commend, this thesis uses “diverse methodologies and analytic tools” (p.34). Thus in Chapter Eight we depart from a chronological account and undertake “...systematic and contextualized comparisons of similar and contrasting cases” (p.13) in the form of the reports of the different eastern countries made by the EU and the European Training Foundation. Chapter Ten consists of interview evidence from a range of people who undertook different roles in the negotiations and in the aid programmes. As will be explained in the next section, we shall also make use of a range of different concepts from within the discipline of political science.

Therefore, broadly, the approach taken is that attributed by McCulloch and Richardson (2000) to the ‘moderate revisionist’ school of educational history, namely an emphasis on narrative flow and on political and social context in explaining change (p.43). This appears uncontentious: a “flexible use of both analytical and narrative modes [of historical writing]: sometimes in alternating sections, sometimes more completely fused throughout the text” is characterised by Tosh as “the way in which most academic historical writing is carried out today” (2010, p.158).

There are however, difficulties in evaluating just what history can tell us, over and above a simple chronicle of events. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer conceive comparative history as being within the sphere of the social sciences which aim to arrive at “universal generalisations and lawlike propositions” (p.22). Taking this view, the endeavour would seem to be to identify ‘historical processes’ which underlie events and which cause (or partially cause) the phenomenon we are interested in.

The trouble arises from the multiplicity of ‘causes’, both in terms of the varieties of influence on a single event, and – more so – in terms of the ‘chain of causation’. Given that any identified cause is itself dependent on a whole range of antecedent events, what gives us any warrant to identify one, or a limited range, of ‘causes’ as being especially significant? The picture becomes yet more clouded when we consider ‘path dependency’ – the idea that “at critical historical junctures, choices are made that put

history on a course from which it is difficult, even impossible, to return” (Katznelson, 2003, p.290). How do we identify such junctures, other than through assertion, when – according to Katznelson – we know very little “about the range of possible trajectories or about mechanisms sustaining a path dependence” which can range from the choices of individuals to “socially shared norms and expectations, [and] to the working of institutional arrangements” (p.292)? A further complexity arises in identifying causal factors in that the possible factors affect each other. Hall (2003) notes that “political outcomes [are] a result of chains of choices that ... actors make in response to each other through iterated rounds of interaction” (p.384).

Given the increasingly muddied waters that causal accounts perforce encounter, Hall notes that “comparative politics has moved away from ontologies [theories of how the world works] that assume causal variables and strong, consistent, and independent effects across space and time towards ones that acknowledge more extensive endogeneity and the ubiquity of complex interaction effects” (p.387).

To cope with the plethora of potential causes, Hall proposes a methodology which does not seek to isolate specific causes and to link them with observed effects (whether through chains of causation, logical comparisons of instances of constant conjunction or disjunction, or statistical methods), but rather through what he terms ‘systemic process analysis’. It is worth quoting his recommendation at length, since this is the methodology adopted in this thesis:

One begins such an enquiry by formulating a set of theories that identify the relevant causal factors and how they operate, along with the rationale for their operation generally couched as deductions from more general contentions about the world based both on previous observations and on axiomatic premises. From each theory, the investigator then derives predictions about the patterns that will appear in observations of the world if the causal theory is valid and if it is false, with special attention to predictions that are consistent with one theory but inconsistent with its principal rivals so as to discern which amongst a set of competing theories is more likely to be valid. Relevant observations are then made of the world (past or present) ... The patterns present in these observations are then inspected for consistency with the predictions of each of the relevant theories with a view to reaching a judgement about which causal theory is superior to the others. (pp.391-2)

The previous section set out a range of theories about the operation of the EU, together with what they might imply about its stance on VET in eastern Europe. As we proceed through the various chapters we shall take stock, as Hall suggests, of the degree to which the events tend to support, or counter, the tenets of each theory. In the final chapter we shall draw the strands together in order to reach conclusions about the strength or otherwise of the various theories in explaining the events that have been recounted. In keeping with Hall's method, I have not attempted to integrate the account of events with their implications for each theory, but rather left this interpretation to the end of each relevant chapter. This, I think, is more likely to allow a balanced view, as well as avoiding the necessity for the reader to keep four separate theoretical strands in play throughout the piece.

I gave notice earlier of a caveat to this 'comparative historical' approach. As we have seen with multi-causality, causal chains and path dependency, the notion of 'cause' has proved somewhat problematic. Indeed Katznelson recognizes that, at a certain point, accounts of chains of causation culminating in full-blown path dependency amount to a "... a haphazard mixture of chance and opportunism deeply at odds with the comparative historical tradition", and have the effect of ruling out of bounds "systematic accounts of large-scale change central to the tradition of macrohistorical scholarship" (p. 292).

There is of course a respectable philosophical tradition of questioning the idea of causation itself. Famously David Hume (1967) sought, but failed, to identify the empirical source of the idea of 'necessary connexion' which characterizes our notion of cause and effect. He concluded that there was no observable evidence beyond the 'constant conjunction' of certain events from which we could infer causation and held that cause and effect (as opposed to observations of simple constant conjunction) was a mental impression which we imposed on events which invariably occurred together.

We do not necessarily have to go this far to recognize that causation is, in practice, a very problematic concept. Consider the apparently straightforward example, drawn from the physical world, of a flagpole



casting a shadow of a certain length.\* What causes the shadow to take the form that it does? The following answers could each be cited:

- the height of the flagpole;
- the time of day;
- the latitude of the location;
- the laws of trigonometry;
- the fact that the sun has just emerged from behind a cloud;
- the fact that the top 5 feet of the flagpole had been lost in a recent storm.

It is not only the large number of possible 'causes' that gives us concern in this example, but also their very varied nature – particularly when one acknowledges that one could nominate many antecedent 'causes' of most items on the list (eg. the reason why the flagpole was placed in that particular location). If all these things – and many more – can be legitimate causes of a simple phenomenon what exactly is one asserting when one claims to have identified a specific cause?

The problem gets worse, however. It is plain that, with one exception, none of the apparently perfectly valid list of 'causes' is a necessary condition of the flagpole's shadow (*ie.* the shadow would only take on its form if this factor was present), and none is a sufficient condition (*ie.* it of itself can account for the form of the shadow). Unfortunately the one exception – the laws of trigonometry as a necessary condition (if they were different the shadow would be different) – does not help us at all. For of all the potential 'causes' it is this which we are actually *least* likely to cite as a cause; indeed to say that the trigonometry *causes* the form of the shadow would be a very odd statement in common speech. So we are left with a multitude of apparent causes none of which are necessary or sufficient conditions – with the only one that does seem to fulfil the aspiration of expressing one of Mahoney and Rueschemeyer's "universal generalisations and lawlike propositions" not actually seeming to satisfy our notion of cause at all.

What are we to make of all of this? It seems that – on examination in an apparently simple case – the aspiration of identifying specific causes has dissolved. At the most we could say either that *the entirety* of the factors,

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\* Here I have used, and extended, the 'flagpole' case given in Okasha (2002).

taken together, is a cause (which is not terribly helpful), or that each of the factors ‘has something to do with’ the shadow – not a very ambitious claim. However if we abandon the idea of causation as the object of enquiry and analysis, and instead substitute the ambition of *explaining* the shadow, things become very much easier. All of the factors can be explanations of why the shadow takes the form it does, but this multiplicity and variety of possible answers does not give us a problem. For while in claiming causation we need to satisfy the test that an identified cause is in some demonstrable way connected to the phenomenon, the test of an adequate explanation is a different one: instead of claiming a mechanism in the real world, an explanation depends for its validity on whether it satisfies the enquirer. And it will satisfy the enquirer to the extent that it overcomes whatever puzzle the enquirer had in raising the query. So, in our example, “It’s 4pm...” may be a perfectly adequate explanation for someone who is puzzling why the shadow is different from what it was yesterday (when he observed it at 3pm), while “The top got blown off in a storm...” would be equally satisfactory to someone who was puzzling why the shadow was not as long as it had been on the same occasion last year.

When we recast the ambition of history, not to identify causes, but rather to elicit explanations, a lot becomes clearer. It is noticeable that Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, and other authors in their collection, often use ‘cause’ and ‘explanation’ interchangeably,\* so if we see the tools they offer as ways of achieving plausible explanations, rather than isolating causes, then we may be treading on solid ground – albeit with less claim to being able either to predict the future (because we have isolated a cause which, if it is repeated, will lead to similar outcomes in the future) or to attribute blame (because we have isolated the cause of an unfavourable event).

On this reading, therefore, history is about achieving *understanding*, for which a systematic account of the linkages between events will sometimes be necessary, but which can also be achieved through other means, such as the identification of key human motivations, critical events and underlying narratives. An objection to this stance might be that understanding is a form of knowledge which can surely only be achieved

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\* See, for example the extract at the beginning of this section (page 29).

through rational argument and demonstrable facts. Not according Wittgenstein:

Try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all... but ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what circumstances, do we say, "Now I know how to go on."  
(Wittgenstein, 1958, p.61)

Wittgenstein is suggesting that understanding is the act of breakthrough, the solving of a puzzle to the satisfaction of the solver, the ability to achieve further knowledge by applying understanding to new instances. Explanation and accounts of causation can be viewed as aiding such breakthroughs, but to do so they need to identify what the problem is that is causing the bottleneck (lack of understanding) in the first place. This will vary from case to case, depending not on the reality of the situation to be explained, but rather on the nature of our own puzzlement. Explanations and accounts of causation may be more or less *useful* to the process of understanding and thus to the acquiring of future knowledge. But they cannot be true or false and so they cannot constitute knowledge themselves, just as perception can lead to knowledge but is not itself knowledge.

The stance here is very similar to the interpretative methodology advocated by Clifford Geertz: "You either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not, accept it or you do not" (1973, p.21). The purpose is not trying to fit things within a governing law but "... to place them within an intelligible frame" (p.26).

This account of history as explanations aimed at producing understanding, rather than making stronger claims about identifying verifiable causes or generalizable processes which can be the subject of moralizing, was favoured by A.J.P. Taylor:

I cannot understand how knowledge of the past provides us with morality, let alone with knowledge of the future... The task of the historian is to explain the past; neither to justify nor to condemn it. Study of history enables us to understand the past; neither more nor less...(quoted in Wrigley, 2006, p.214)

It follows from this that in seeking to establish a historical narrative and explanation of what 'caused' what, we should not be too worried if we are not comprehensive, if we are selective, or if there are plausible alternative explanations. For, though the facts which we deploy ought to be true, and

should be capable of verification as true or false, the explanations of cause are satisfactory only inasmuch as they are illuminating. And they will be illuminating if they manage to produce, in the reader, the breakthrough of which Wittgenstein spoke. This I believe, is the 'art' of history which goes alongside its 'scientific' factual base. It is what makes history a humanity, rather than a social science.

So the answers that will be given to the research questions on page 13 should be interpreted as giving explanations rather than claiming causal relationships. Similarly when examining the cases for and against the various theories of European integration set out in the previous section, the aim is – using Hall's method – to test which of the interpretations are the most plausible, rather than which are most likely to represent immutable 'historical processes' to which the future either will conform or from which it will need a special impetus to escape.

### Policy Analysis

As well as history, this study will make use of the discipline of policy analysis, because – after all – it is policy and its formation that we are interested in. A good deal of recent educational policy analysis has a sociological flavour, with contributors either seeking to demonstrate the way in which educational policy reflects structural societal fundamentals (Taylor et al., 1997) or exploring the 'policymaking community' as a sociological phenomenon in itself (Ozga and Gewirtz, 1994; Raab, 1994).

I find such approaches rather contrived, particularly in an EU setting where pan-European class-based 'struggles' seem notable by their absence, and the policymaking community is widely dispersed. I propose rather to utilize a rather more eclectic range of concepts drawn from general policy analysis. I have in mind, in particular, the notions of 'lesson-drawing' (Rose, 1991) which deals with the appropriateness or otherwise of transposing policy ideas from one setting to another (in particular in this case, across national borders). The notion of 'epistemic communities' (Adler and Haas, 1992) – is relevant to the social-constructivist theory of EU integration which posits the growth of such communities at a pan-European level. The concept of 'street-level bureaucracy' (Lipsky, 1979) recognizes that front-line workers, for example in projects, will set their own

agendas. The idea of 'image-making' (Stone, 1989), which describes how the diagnosis of problems and the construction of a narrative around them determines the subsequent policy response, informs Chapter Seven which deals with the concepts of the time.

As to a central theory about how policies are made and which of them are selected for implementation, I am attracted by Kingdon's (1985) conception of competing policies in a 'primeval soup' vying for relevant problems which they can answer and for the right political circumstances to allow them to get off the drawing board:

Advocates of a new policy initiative not only take advantage of politically propitious moments but also claim that their proposal is a solution to a pressing problem ... At points along the way, there are partial couplings: solutions to problems, but without a receptive political climate: politics to proposals, but without a sense that a compelling problem is being solved; politics and problems both calling for action but without an available alternative to advocate. But the complete joining of all three streams dramatically enhances the odds that a subject will become firmly fixed on a decision agenda. (201-2)

A conception of this kind may help explain why some rather unlikely features (for example a national qualifications framework) became high priority for transition societies. Though coming from a different school, Ball's (1994) account of policy concerned with British education reform sounds rather similar to Kingdon's:

The [policy] texts are the product of compromises at various stages...They are typically the cannibalized products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas. There is ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formulation process. (p.16)

The basic stance on the issue of policy development, therefore, is that a good deal is about the right ideas coming up at the right time and being supported by the right people with the right rationale. A historical approach is capable of showing how this constellation of factors comes about.

## **Methods**

### *Structure of the thesis*

In writing history, the structure of the narrative is itself part of the method; if analysis is also woven in, as Tosh suggests, one needs some kind of

schema other than simple chronology to allow significance to be extracted, and so for understanding to be gained.

In their study of the modern evolution of education policy Taylor et al. (1997) point out that:

There is always a prior history of significant events, a particular ideological and political climate, a social and economic context ... which together influence the shape and timing of policies as well as their evolution and their outcomes. (p.16)

We shall make use of the three elements they describe: prior history, relevant contemporary events (context), and the prevailing ideas affecting VET in structuring this study. The starting point for the interventions in VET in eastern Europe was in the years after the collapse of communism in 1989. Chapters Three and Four examine the position respectively of VET in the communist East, and of VET policy in the EU, in the years before that, using a largely narrative mode. In terms of the context which brought about the need for the EU to have a policy on VET in eastern Europe, the most relevant events were the process of economic transition from planned to market economies and the process of enlargement culminating, in the mid-2000s, in accession of most of the eastern countries; Chapters Five and Six are devoted to each of these strands, with an emphasis in each case on the implications for VET. Again a narrative mode is used with a separate chronology for each topic.

We can conceive the ideas governing VET as a product of the prior history combined with the implications of the events as experienced by the actors of the time; however ideas, once formed, take on a life of their own and may themselves influence future events. Chapter Seven draws together, in a partly speculative form, the ideas affecting VET that might be derived from the political ideas which were dominant in the region in the 1990s. The resulting framework of ideas is then tested in an explicitly analytical way in Chapter Eight by examining the various diagnoses made by the EU of the state of VET in the East – the framing of the problem in Kingdon's terms. This analysis is taken further in Chapter Nine in looking at the programmes for supporting VET development. Thus, having noted the views a range of the actors in Chapter Ten, we shall arrive at conclusions which are based not only on an analysis of the evolution of policies through

historical methods, but also on an analysis of the policies in action, to test whether the rhetorical policies were actually given effect.

### Documentary sources

A good deal of the study is based on secondary documentary sources, usually books or edited collections. There are a number of 'core' accounts which I used to guide my further reading or to seek out primary sources. These core accounts were:

- A survey of educational practice in each of the eastern European communist states (but not the Baltic states which were then part of the Soviet Union) in the mid-1960s by Nigel Grant (1969). Though I have not relied explicitly on this account for a great deal of the material in Chapter Three on the communist legacy (it relates circumstances well before the revolutions of 1989-91) it did give me a basic understanding of the school system in most of the separate countries which allowed me to place references by subsequent authors in context.
- Much of Chapter Four is informed by an official publication about the evolution of EU education policy, henceforth referred to as the 'Official History' (European Commission, 2006b). This was used as a guide to the official documents, resolutions, decisions, regulations etc., which are referred to in this thesis; it also is of interest in giving a perspective on the thinking of those who were involved, as staff, in the formulation of the Commission's education policies. The *Official History* treats the evolution of EU policy as a natural and inevitable tide of events, bringing ever deeper involvement of the central EU institutions, and ever broader scope of interests in the education and training field. In this unrolling of events, the member states are portrayed as jealous of their policy territory, sometimes benighted and occasionally downright obstructive, while a rather ill-defined 'public' is represented as pressing for Community leadership and keen to become involved in EU initiatives when their governments permit. So an allowance has to be made for the interpretation of some of the actions recounted in the *Official History*, though there is no reason to suspect that the actions themselves are not properly described.

- Chapter Five, on economic transition and its effect on education, makes use a range of statistics from Eurostat. The reader will note that the data sources will not always instance all of the countries, largely because the Eurostat series tend to start including a country after it is clear that it is on the road to accession and begins to produce statistics in line with Eurostat's definitions; this point occurred at different times for different countries. In two cases (the charts on pages 98 and 99) I have 'retrospectively' calculated education participation rates using the methodology described in the footnote to page 97. This chapter also uses a survey of education and labour markets of each country undertaken towards the end of period (Kogan, 2008), in some ways mirroring Grant's study 40 years earlier.
- Chapter Nine is aided by Jean-Raymond Masson's account (2003) of the shifting emphases of the EU's *Phare* support programme, and in particular by Masson's references to individual evaluation studies, a number of which are cited in this chapter.

### Numerical Analysis

Chapter Eight is a largely numerical analysis based on a series of 'regular reports' made by the Commission on progress to accession by each country and a series of 'Monographs' drawn up by the European Training Foundation (ETF) between 2002 and 2004. The comprehensive nature of the archive of regular reports\* and their standardized format make it possible to analyze them methodically.

The 'regular reports' cover the whole range of accession issues, from political governance to agricultural policies. They change slightly in structure over the period, but in all cases there are two sections relevant to VET, one concerned with employment issues, and another specifically with education. A further section on the mutual recognition of qualifications appears from 2000 onwards. It is these passages which are analyzed in Chapter Eight. Additionally there are other references to VET-related issues within the reports, particularly in connection with projects under

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\* Available at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/key\\_documents/reports\\_1998\\_en.htm#report](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/key_documents/reports_1998_en.htm#report).



*Phare*, overall economic competitiveness and the treatment of minorities. To reveal these additional references, a word-search of each document was made using the terms 'vocational', 'education', 'training' and 'human resources', discarding those results which transpired not to be relevant to the question of VET policy.

The ETF reports are lengthier and more or less entirely focussed on VET. Except in the case of Slovenia, each has a substantial executive summary, comprising around one third of the whole document, and it is this that was used for analysis.

Each document was categorized as to the country, year of reference and type (EU or ETF report).

This process of identification of relevant passages resulted in a corpus of text for analysis consisting of extracts from 74 documents comprising some 200,000 words. Analysis was performed through *Nvivo*. First a coding frame was set up using the categories set out in the previous Chapter Seven, namely:

- Decentralization
- Europeanization
- Modernization
- Lifelong Learning
- Transparency

Further categories were added as it became clear that other topics were also the focus of attention. A full list of codes used and the number of references noted under each is given in Annex A.

### Interviews

Chapter Ten presents evidence from nine interviews conducted in order to provide context to the documentary evidence and to explore a few particular remaining issues. The individuals were selected both to provide a perspective on policy (of the EU on the one hand and of the eastern countries on the other), and to reflect the different roles. I also wanted to include a range of nationalities. The interviewees were:

- a Romanian VET policymaker during the period before accession
- a Danish senior official at ETF who had previously worked in the Commission

a Dutch ETF official who had had responsibility for monitoring VET in a number of eastern countries before their accession

a French senior official at ETF

a Serbian project advisor who had previously been an official in the Ministry of Education

a British team leader of EU-funded projects in Serbia and Romania

a British consultant with experience of drawing up terms of reference for support projects

a Hungarian consultant on projects, including in Croatia and Romania.

a Bulgarian education practitioner who later became a consultant on projects, including Croatia, specializing in IT systems

The interviews took place between October 2009 and December 2010. They lasted between 30 and 65 minutes. A half-page brief of the kinds of questions I had was given to interviewees in advance and re-presented at the interview itself. An example is at Annex B. Interviews were semi-structured within this framework.

The interviews were in English. Extracts have been slightly amended to inject clarity (imputed words are in square brackets), and to make the English intelligible while retaining some of the idiosyncrasies of those who were speaking in a language which was foreign to them.

In conducting the interviews I had regard to ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011), and in particular to the principle of 'voluntary informed consent' (p.5). Participants were informed of the purpose of the interviews in the initial approach, when sent the interview brief, and at the beginning of the interview itself. Each interviewee's consent to the interview and to their remarks being transcribed and possibly published was explicitly recorded as having been given. In general the subject matter of the interviews was not sensitive, and no interviewee asked for any remark to be treated as confidential. The interviews were recorded under condition of anonymity as a number of participants who were expressing views about the conduct of EU projects were likely to apply for posts in such projects in the future. Some interviewees said that they did not mind being named, but I decided not to do so, since it might seem odd to name some, but not others.

The interviews were conducted in the form of a conversation; I had met all but two of the individuals before, and known most reasonably well. All of them knew I had been a member of project teams and a former UK

policymaker. I was therefore acting in the capacity of a 'Researcher-Practitioner' (Robson, 1993). In this I believe I enjoyed some of the advantages ascribed by Robson (p.447), including an acknowledged pre-existing knowledge base, which reduced the time needed to establish a rapport and allowed the use of mutually recognizable jargon. In practice, one of the disadvantages noted by Robson – that of difficulties in hierarchy getting in the way of frank exchanges between people in the same organization – were, I believe, avoided as the independent self-employed nature of consultants does not carry any very recognizable pecking order. On the other hand it may be that some tacit assumptions were shared, or were presumed to be shared, to the detriment of the objectivity that would have applied in the case of an 'outsider'. In reporting extracts from the interviews in Chapter Ten I have sometimes included my own contributions in order to give a feel for the nature of the interaction.

Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using *Nvivo*. A coding frame was generated after reading the transcripts and in the light of the questions originally presented to the interviewees; these questions (see Annex B) related to the procedures for designing, bidding for and running *Phare* projects, to the role and reception of the experts, both foreign and 'local' who worked in them, and to the pressures exerted on, and by, policymakers in the countries concerned. This frame was added to in the course of coding, as new, noteworthy, topics came up. Finally, after coding, the various codes were 're-grouped (using *Nvivo*'s 'tree node' facility) into what seemed a more coherent set of issues.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Rude Health or an Underlying Malady? The Communist Heritage and the Reaction to it**

#### **Introduction**

What does seem clear is that [the authorities] are trying to bring the disparate elements of education and training – general and special, academic and practical – into some kind of unity, to find a way of educating at the same time the worker, the citizen and the person. (Grant, 1969, pp.122-3)

The "all-round development of the personality" was the stated goal, but education was only provided in accordance with what used to be termed "societal needs". Its range, level and orientation were determined by political and ideological intentions and by bureaucratic and economic factors, all of which were at times arbitrary. (Svecová, 1994, p.94)

These are two rather different conclusions, drawn at different times by people of different nationalities. Grant, a British observer, was recording his impressions after a tour of eastern European education systems in the mid-1960s. Svecová was writing about her own country of Czechoslovakia just after the collapse of the communist system. Was Grant hoodwinked? Was Svecová misrepresenting the past? Had the system changed in the interim? Or are the two different points of view merely two sides of the same coin?

In this chapter we briefly sketch what the eastern European VET system was like under communism and what the reaction was after its fall; in the latter task we make use of a range of mainly domestic authors writing about the early transition years before the EU's intervention got significantly under way.

#### **The historical and geographical context**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up until the end of the first world war the area we are concerned with was largely subsumed in four empires. Eight of our twelve countries lay wholly, or in part, within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Baltic States lay within the Russian Empire, Bulgaria lay for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the Ottoman Empire, from which Serbia and Romania

(though in both cases substantially smaller than today) had recently gained their independence. Poland was divided between the Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

After the first world war, which saw the demise of all of these empires, a range of independent states were created. Hungary was separated from Austria; Poland was re-united, the three Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) were established.

However all of this territory was occupied in the second world war. Much of it suffered three occupations (by the Soviet Union, Germany and then the Soviet Union again), and much of it experienced devastation of its infrastructure and the deliberate extermination or forcible removal of large portions of its population.

By 1950 each of our countries had a communist government. The Baltic States had been absorbed into the Soviet Union, which had liberated and then dominated all of the territory we are interested in, with the exception of Yugoslavia which – under its leader, Tito – exercised an increasingly independent path after its split from the Soviet Union in 1948 (Glenny, 1999).

Much of the region was rural though industrialization had taken place in some of the larger centres in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in Czechoslovakia. Complex ethnic, religious and language groupings characterized the area, particularly in the Balkan peninsula. A large Roma community, which was spread over the centre and south of the region, remained largely outside mainstream civic society and therefore outside any formal educational provision.

In terms of education the main legacy of the pre-Communist era was a fairly comprehensive provision of elementary education. However, some parts of the extensive rural areas were poorly served and illiteracy amongst the adult rural population was common – 25-40 per cent in the Balkans and Poland (Grant, 1969). There were a number of secondary schools in the urban areas, notably the pervasive *Gimnasium* (grammar school). Vocational education, however, seems not to have been widespread or organized on a mass basis, though there were some specialized facilities to produce engineers and institutes for the armed forces and in Prussia a

number of trade schools sprang up in the early nineteenth century (Green, 1990). Technical schools began to arise in some urban areas around the turn of the century, but inasmuch as vocational education was conducted at all over the large rural tracts of the eastern territories, one can presume that it was in some kind of apprenticeship mode – the long-standing German communities that could be found in towns as far away as eastern Transylvania often included guild-type arrangements.\* However outside Prussia and the territory of the current Czech Republic, there was little industrialization before the first world war, and therefore little need for formal training (Mitter, 1992).

A further characteristic to note was the practice of centralized administration of education. For example, the elementary schools of the Austro-Hungarian empire had standardized curriculum and textbooks by the beginning of the nineteenth century (Parížek, 1992).

### **Main features of the education system under communism**

We do not attempt here to describe all the features of the education system under communism, but rather to draw out those features that will be most significant – either in terms of their continuance and adaptation, or in terms of the later reactions to them – to the stories of transition and accession that follow.†

Education was highly centralized, with the exception of Yugoslavia where some discretion was given to the constituent republics and to schools themselves – which were run, like the enterprises, on co-operative lines (OECD, 1981). This was not just a matter of control by ministries, but, more significantly that of the Communist Party. Szebenyi describes how, in Hungary, apparent control by local education authorities in fact meant that

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\* For example, the Black Church in Brasov contains memorials to the German-speaking guilds of that (now) Romanian town. The Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb in Croatia exhibits a range of the *Meisterstück* produced by those qualifying as master craftsmen.

† This section draws on: Grant (1969) – all countries except Baltic States; Nagy (1994) and Halász (1998) – Hungary; Liivik et al. (2013)– Baltic States; Potkonjak (1986) –Yugoslavia; Sandi (1992) – Romania; and Holmberg and Wojtowicz (1990) – Poland.

“...they only implemented the orders of the central, county and district committees of the party” (1992, p.63).

Although each of the countries had their own education ministries and Party apparatus, there was undoubtedly a commonality in their education policies. This did not simply result from the following of a lead from the Soviet Union, though this was certainly a factor for most of our countries (Anweiler, 1992), but also resulted from an element of educational philosophy inherent in the communist creed. This idea, generally referred to as ‘polytechnical education’, had its roots in Marxist theory which held that productive work should feature in the education of all age-groups, and that a proper schooling should achieve a balance between “mental education, bodily education and technological training” (Castles and Wüstenberg, 1979, p.39).

From this stemmed three characteristics which could be observed widely in all the countries. The first was a focus on incorporating actual work as part of the curriculum. How this was done varied from country to country and from time to time, but included – for example – the inclusion of handicrafts at primary school, attendance at work places for one day a week, and mandatory training in a specific occupation, even for young people pursuing general education tracks (Luburić, 1999; Rosenkrantz, Apel and Kehrer, 1965; Svecová, 1994). Also relevant to this strand were the youth organizations to which most youngsters belonged and which organized activities, including useful work and cultural visits, often sponsored by local enterprises (Castles and Wüstenberg, 1979; Grant, 1969).

The second strand was an emphasis on applied science and technology, which featured prominently in the curriculum, often at the expense of the humanities (Kogan, 2008). Linked to this was a third strand – the development of discrete technical colleges at the upper secondary level, separate from specifically vocational training arrangements. Introduced in the 1960s, after the post-Stalin education reforms announced by Nikita Khrushchev in 1958 (Soltys, 1997), these schools focused on the education of future technicians and held out the prospect (unlike more traditional trade training) of students gaining a full secondary leaving certificate, rendering them eligible (though not entitled) to progress to higher education.

The technical schools were generally four years in duration, following on from eight years of 'basic' (elementary) schooling. However in Poland these schools generally lasted for five years (Wulff, 1992), while in Czechoslovakia, after the introduction of a 10 year basic school, they only constituted a two-year upper secondary phase (Svecová, 1994). Indeed a number of countries sought to extend the phase of general education, before division into tracks took place. Firm plans were made to do so in Poland in the 1970s, though in the event they were aborted (Pachocinski, 1994). A similar development took place in the 1970s in Yugoslavia, whereby the first two years of the secondary four year schools were focused on general, rather than vocational, topics with a common curriculum across all types of school; this was both an attempt to increase the 'knowledge' element of education generally, and to lessen what was seen as the "undemocratic social selection" which had arisen between general, technical and strictly vocational tracks (Potkonjak, 1986, p.10).

On either side of the technical schools were, on the one hand, the legacy of the old *gimnasia*, now reduced from former six or eight year schools to four years (or two in Czechoslovakia, and formally abolished in Yugoslavia as part of the reforms of the 1970s). On the other side was vocational training which did not lead to a full secondary leaving certificate, and with it the possibility of higher education.\*

The vocational training track usually lasted between two and three years after basic school, depending on the occupation in question. It constituted a mixture of necessary theoretical/technical elements; practice, in enterprises or in school workshops; and continuing general education. Though less intense and wide-ranging than that undertaken in the technical schools, the general education components could nevertheless be quite extensive. In Milosević's Serbia, for example, literature, a foreign language, civics, history, music, fine arts, sports, mathematics, ICT, physics, chemistry, and ecology all featured in the three-year vocational programmes (Expert Group for Vocational Education and Training, 2001).

These vocational schools were often attached to – indeed part of – the large state enterprises which dominated towns and cities, and came under

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\* Though countries had various supplementary and 'bridging' courses by which a graduate of vocational training could gain a full secondary certificate, for example through evening classes.



the control of the relevant ministry (eg. of Transport, Shipbuilding, Agriculture, etc.) rather than of Education (Viertel, 1994).<sup>\*</sup> In Yugoslavia, where the enterprises were run as co-operatives ('organizations of associated labour'), these had to agree plans and financing with the schools (Potkonjak, 1986). Plans for the numbers of students in each vocational specialism were agreed in some fine detail between schools and enterprises and constituted a "meticulously calculated manpower supply for the state planned economy" (Strietska-Illina, 2007b, p.35).

The division between the three secondary tracks, general (*ex-gimnasia*), technical, and strictly vocational was well understood, though – as we shall see – sometimes challenged. The general track was usually the smallest; in Hungary in the 1980s, some 20 per cent took this, compared with nearly 30 per cent going to technical schools and over 40 per cent on vocational tracks (Halász, Semjén and Setényi, 1993, p.28). In Poland the proportions at the same time were very similar (Piwowarski, 1996, p.49). Before the reforms of the 1970s and the (formal) abolition of the *gimnasia* track, the proportion in general education in Yugoslavia was a rather higher 30 per cent (Potkonjak, 1986, p.29). And in the Soviet Republics of Estonia and Lithuania the general track was the largest of the three (Kogan, 2008).

Though having expanded considerably since the war, by 1989 higher education was not extensive – around 10 per cent of a youth cohort in Hungary (Nagy, 1994) and 16 per cent in Czechoslovakia (Parížek, 1992). Again, universities tended to be dominated by technical and vocationally relevant courses (Kogan, 2008). In addition there were tertiary non-University vocational courses (ISCED 4) similar to German *Fachschulen*; these gave chances both for graduates of general secondary education not proceeding to full higher education to undertake vocational training (usually for 2-3 years), and for existing workers to upgrade their qualifications. Examples include the *viša škola* of Yugoslavia and the *școala tehnica* of Romania, but equivalents existed in most countries.

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<sup>\*</sup> In a number of countries these schools, and their links with firms, were described as 'apprenticeships'. Though the occupationally specific training and in-firm practical elements mirrored aspects of pre-war apprenticeship, the dominance in an area of a single enterprise (or limited number of firms), plus the absence of competition between young people for the best employer and amongst employers for the best apprentices, made the communist arrangements very different from those that obtained before the war or in the apprenticeship countries of the West (Evans, Behrens and Kaluza, 2000).

Finally we should remark on education and training for adults. Most such training was undertaken in firms, and depended on the need for new skills demanded by new processes and machinery. But there were sizeable programmes for increasing the general level of education amongst the adult population, many of whom had grown up in pre-war or wartime conditions and had not benefitted from anything beyond elementary education. There were large programmes to promote literacy, particularly in rural areas, which were largely completed by the end of the 1960s (Grant, 1969). However adult education was about much more than this; a striking example was in Yugoslavia where a pre-war movement of 'people's universities' focusing largely on folk traditions was expanded under Tito to cover 2.5 million people, or over 10 per cent of the population (Krajnc and Mumale, 1978). Part of this was ideological, involving the "...joint study of party documents and Marxist literature" (p.13), but it also involved socio-economic understanding and the study of individual school subjects, as well as vocational topics. And these non-formal and non-certificated 'universities' stood outside other modes of adult education, such as the extra-mural departments of formal higher education institutions and evening classes in schools under which recognized certificates could be achieved.

How strong was communist vocational education? Certainly it had admirers, including Grant after his tour in the late 1960s. The idea of polytechnical education attracted particular interest from visitors from the West such as Holmes (1961) who wondered whether it could be an answer to the fostering within education of the technological advancement which was seen as necessary for competitiveness. And the communist emphasis on the preparation for responsible work roles was plainly copied by some western countries (Castles and Wüstenberg, 1979).

Perhaps the most striking comparison with the West was the sheer scale of participation in secondary education that was achieved in the communist East. Calculations by Kogan (2008, p.9) show that during the 1970s and 1980s, when upper secondary completion rates in the EU averaged around 45 per cent, all the eastern countries with the exception of Lithuania and Bulgaria\* had upper secondary completion rates of over 60 per cent and in

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\* Lithuania's was around the EU average, and Bulgaria's just under 60 per cent.

five (the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) it stood at over 70 per cent.

This is not to say that the communist system did not display problems. A number of aspects caused difficulties, which were recognized as such at the time. Some examples will indicate their nature. In the Baltic States the original aspiration of 'secondary education for all' which accompanied the introduction of four year technical schools had to be modified through reversion to lower level one or two year vocational programmes when it became clear that not all pupils could succeed at the higher level – Liivik et al. (2013) cite drop-out in the 1960s at 25-30 per cent (p.78). In Hungary, Halász, Semjén and Setényi (1993) describe how – over the years – the technical strand varied in aim between providing, on the one hand, a fairly broad vocational preparation in applied subjects for all and, on the other, explicit training for technician jobs, and how it was deliberately reined back in the 1970s in favour of lower level trade training when demographic trends exposed a shortage of workers for existing factories.

There was worry, too, about the tacit social selection that was occurring in the different secondary tracks – certainly something not countenanced in communist ideology. A Polish study by Kluczyński and Sanyal (1985) showed that students from 'white collar' families were more than twice as likely as those from 'blue collar' backgrounds to take the (comparatively restricted) general education track at upper secondary level. The white collar group would "...only settl[e] for the junior vocational or technical secondary school if for some reason they are forced to by social or economic difficulties" (p.55).

As we have seen, it was this kind of effect which stimulated Yugoslavia to embark on reforms which aimed largely to obliterate the divisions between the tracks. However this path, it transpired, was fraught with difficulties. There were pedagogical difficulties in "...operationalizing socio-political principles" (Potkonjak, 1986, p.11), such that "contrary to expectations the new [untracked] secondary schools retained many traditional and conventional features and showed themselves to be rigid" (p.10). And the 'undemocratic social selection' seemed to re-assert itself in the new dispensation with a feeling that courses at the new polytechnic schools in "... non-productive [public sector] vocations are nothing other than the earlier stream in the high schools (for mathematics languages and

humanities etc.)" (p.11). While recognizing that the polytechnic secondary might in due course be regarded as the "school of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (p.11), Potkonjak acknowledged that at the time it was proving hard to satisfy all – or indeed perhaps any – of the various interests; universities demanded more general education ("good old gymnasium") and enterprises wanted more practical and technical skills – "good old apprenticeship" (p.23).\*

More severe reservations were made by Castles and Wüstenberg – observers plainly sympathetic to the precepts of socialist education. They concluded their 1979 review education in East Germany by deploring that the emancipatory aspirations of polytechnic education had turned into the "the process of training hard-working, conformist people" being "pumped full of knowledge." The Communist Party "has taken the marxist concept of polytechnic education and robbed it of its real content" (p.99).

Perhaps predictably, post-revolutionary writers tend to be harsher still. Sandi (1992) claims that in Romania the practical elements of polytechnical education had turned into "...compulsory 'voluntary work' in rural areas pushed beyond any bearable limits" (p.87). There were also complaints about the over-crowding of the curriculum, and a stress on encyclopedic knowledge rather than problem-solving (Parizek, 1992; Szebenyi, 1992), though Janowski – an early post-communist education minister – considered that "the Polish school has managed to preserve the cult of solid education understood chiefly as a body of knowledge" (1992, p.46).

More profound problems, perhaps, were due to the economic context. Failing economies led to restricted expenditure on education, dramatically so in Romania where education expenditure dropped to two per cent of GDP in 1988, and the pupil to teacher ratio was 43 – double that of 1975 (Sandi, 1992). Moreover, with guaranteed jobs, restricted higher education, and low wage differentials, Janowski points out that individuals were not greatly motivated to excel in education – "gaining knowledge was not a profitable investment" (1992, p.42).

So the undoubtedly high participation may have been accompanied by some problems of social division, lack of motivation and dubious quality.

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\* The travails in England of *Curriculum 2000* (Hodgson and Spours, 2003) and *GNVQs* (Capey, 1995) spring to mind.

One might add that these aspects were hardly foreign to education in the West. Can we reach any judgment about the effectiveness of vocational education under communism? Two indicators might be achievement in internationally comparative tests, and labour productivity.

The OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD/Statistics Canada, 2000) reported on prose, document and quantitative literacy amongst adults in a range of countries during the period 1994-8. It gives scores for those aged 26-35, who, in the four eastern countries which participated, would have undertaken secondary education in the latter years of the communist regimes. Table 1 shows the scores, together with the rank and interquartile intervals – a measure of the dispersal of student scores within a country – for all the (current) EU countries which participated:

**Table 1: Mean scores, country rank, and interquartile intervals of 26-35 year olds participating in IALS 1994-8**

<i>Prose Literacy</i>	Mean	Rank	Interquartile
Germany	284	4	60
Ireland	272	8	58
Netherlands	295	3	46
<b>Poland</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>64</b>
Sweden	314	1	53
UK	275	7	70
<b>Czech Rep</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>50</b>
Denmark	284	5	37
Finland	307	2	49
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>51</b>
Portugal	232	12	101
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>63</b>

<i>Document Literacy</i>	Mean	Rank	Interquartile
Germany	294	6	58
Ireland	267	8	66
Netherlands	299	4	50
<b>Poland</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>80</b>
Sweden	319	1	59
UK	278	7	82
<b>Czech Rep</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>62</b>
Denmark	308	3	44
Finland	310	2	54
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>64</b>
Portugal	229	12	80
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>69</b>

**Table 1 (cont)**

<i>Quantitative Literacy</i>	Mean	Rank	Interquartile
Germany	300	4	55
Ireland	271	9	72
Netherlands	298	6	54
<b>Poland</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>79</b>
Sweden	317	1	62
UK	277	7	83
<b>Czech Rep</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>63</b>
Denmark	307	3	44
Finland	300	4	49
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>70</b>
Portugal	238	12	95
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>74</b>

Source: OECD/Statistics Canada (2000), Table 3.4

The Czech Republic did moderately well in prose and document literacy and notably well in quantitative skills. However the other three countries were towards the bottom of rankings in all three fields, though in each case performed better than Portugal, the only Mediterranean country to take part. All the eastern countries had a relatively high dispersal of scores – again with the partial exception of the Czech Republic in the case of prose literacy – though none as high as the UK.

These results would seem to show that in these basic, but important aspects, the eastern countries were almost on a par with northern European peers. Given their relatively underdeveloped state before the war, and the devastation visited on them during it, this might be seen as something of an achievement. On the other hand, the very high participation rates (and generous allocations of general education during vocational courses) that we have noted do not seem to have paid off in terms of clearly enhanced performance. So this evidence may point to some issues concerning the quality of instruction and/or motivation of students.

The productivity of labour is a trickier issue, since labour productivity measures not only the skills and motivation of workers, but also the efficiency of allocation of capital. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which monitored productivity throughout the period of transition, reported a decline in the early years after the fall of communism, but its 1999 *Transition Report* (European Bank for

Reconstruction and Development, 1999) noted a distinct increase in productivity in some countries and considered that many eastern European countries “should be well placed for rapid growth because of their high level of acquired skills” (p.71). It would seem therefore, that a good skills base was showing through in these countries.

However, the following year – after a special survey of employers – the EBRD was much more downbeat. The evidence now “qualifies the view that the region has abundant human capital resources, despite considerable achievements in formal education” (p.vi). Employers investing in the East viewed skilled labour in central and eastern Europe as around 75 per cent as productive as those in their home countries, and in the Balkan region at only 65 per cent as productive. The survey indicated that “...a lack of general flexibility or adaptability is by far the greatest perceived deficiency across all educational categories” (p.117). This lends some credence to the earlier critics who pointed to over-burdening with factual knowledge and the narrowness of occupational profiles.

Altogether, therefore, we might characterize the state of VET in the East at the point of transition from communism as having scored some considerable achievements: it had made great inroads into a backlog of adult illiteracy in rural areas; it had achieved secondary participation rates far higher than most western countries and at a much earlier date; it had solidly established the equivalent of the technical schools promised in England’s 1944 Education Act, but which were never delivered, and it had introduced (though not always wholly successfully) an imaginative work-related curriculum twenty years before, say, Britain’s *Technical and Vocational Education Initiative* of the 1980s (Dale et al., 1990).

On the other hand, communist VET was clearly prone to many of the same problems as in the West. Social divisions seemed hard to overcome, even in a nominally comprehensive system; rhetoric outran reality, particularly in the ill-defined area of polytechnic education; aspirations for high levels of education for all proved unrealistic when confronted with the abilities and aspirations of ‘real world’ students on the one hand, and the immediate needs of employers on the other. Moreover the relatively static occupational structure of the communist world and the lack of investment and innovation in its later years seems to have inhibited workers from acquiring the resilience and adaptability that western employers expected.

## **Revolutionary reactions to education issues**

The immediate post-communist atmosphere was a heady, if chaotic, time with many countries having little coherent, let alone agreed, visions for the societies that were emerging. The metaphor of being in the position of 'rebuilding the ship while at sea' was a common one (Elster, Offe and Preuss, 1998; Strietska-Ilina, 2007b). And of course there was the initial business of forming political groupings and drawing up political programmes.

Despite the reform agendas which had bubbled up in the 1980s, there was no cogent and coherent programme for educational change in any country. Reviewing the situation in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary shortly after the changes Karsten and Majoor concluded:

Old structures and old certainties are breaking up, but the contours of a new order are not yet clear. There are no parties or actors with a clear programmatic view. What strikes outsiders most is a lack of vision about the future of each of these societies and the role of education in that vision. (1994, p.157)

moreover was not education best left to the professionals?

Most of the parties held rather vague and general ideas about education, about which they did not differ much. Educational debates were overwhelmingly determined by educational experts with modernizing and technocratic values. (Nagy, 1994, p.60)

In these circumstances the dominant theme in the immediate post-revolution period seems to have been reaction to the past rather than a purposeful preparation for the future. Thus there were early moves to undo the most manifest symbols of communist rule; in all countries explicit ideological content was debarred from the curriculum, leading in some cases to the withdrawal of textbooks in history, the social sciences and civics, and the temporary suspension of examinations in affected subjects (Mitter, 1992; Polyzoi and Černá, 2003).

In parallel the compulsory teaching of Russian was ended more or less immediately in all countries where this applied. In its place other western European languages were promoted. Sudden changes to the policies of language teaching involved a very considerable effort; Janowski describes the steps necessary to introduce universal provision of English in Poland,



with the expansion of teachers of English from 1,500 to 25,000, involving the establishment of 55 foreign language teacher-training colleges.

University autonomy was commonly an immediate reform and private universities were permitted in many countries. In most countries, too, there were early moves to allow, and to an extent encourage, the establishment of non-state schools particularly by religious denominations, voluntary groups and innovatory educators. However the non-state sector did not become widespread except for Catholic schools in Poland where religious education had been a feature of the landscape even in Communist times; Janowski (1992) records the establishment of 200 non-state schools in the first two years after communism – most of them not-for-profit, though there were also a few for-profit institutions. Such privatization of schools as did take place, however, seldom affected the initial vocational education sector, though the growth of the private sector in the adult sphere was significant, as we shall see.

The common syllabus of the basic, comprehensive, school was heavily challenged in some places. Mitter draws a distinction between a mild form of reform which allowed a degree of specialization in the second, lower secondary, cycle of basic school, and a more radical form which re-introduced the institution of the pre-war eight year *gimnasium*. As we have seen – under communism – explicitly academic tracks had been largely restricted to a two year upper secondary cycle. In Hungary and the Czech Republic, some six and eight year selective academic schools were revived. However, according to Kogan (2008), this type of reform was far from universal, and even in the countries where it was most common it did not affect more than ten per cent of pupils.

In some countries, such as Czechoslovakia, decentralization of responsibility of schools to local government took place at an early stage (Polyzoi and Černá, 2003), though often without much by the way of associated financing, at least in the first instance (Hințea, Șandor and Junjan, 2004; Karsten and Majoor, 1994). In tandem vocational schools, which had often operated under relevant industrial or agricultural ministries in communist times (Viertel, 1994) were in many cases moved within the ambit of ministries of education. However in some countries this process took some time – in Latvia it did not occur until 2004 (Lanka and Mūrnieks, 2006).

Finally we should note the difficulty faced in a number of countries of purging the teaching force of (real or suspected) sympathizers of the old regime. Though none of the eastern European countries seem to have had as acute a problem as the former German Democratic Republic where there had been a considerable network of *Stasi* informers amongst the teaching profession (Phillips, 1992), Hungary and Poland, for example, required school Directors to be confirmed or selected by votes amongst their teaching staff (Janowski, 1992; Mitter, 1992).

### *The situation in the early 1990s*

At around the end of 1992, these immediate reactions had worked their way through, and the new governments and education reform groups were left wondering about the next steps. Some legislative consolidation of the early reforms had been made, but both the future direction of educational reform and the capacity to undertake it were considered problematic in many cases. For example with respect to policy on pedagogy there was, as we have seen, much comment about the 'didactic' and 'authoritarian' styles of teaching necessitated by an 'encyclopaedic' curriculum. But whether, and if so how, to change this was by no means clear, nor that it would be politically acceptable to do so. Polyzoi and Černá (2003) refer to two systems existing side by side; the formal one notionally liberalized by new laws, but the actual one still uniform as a result of the training of teachers and continued acceptance of the 'traditional' curriculum.

It was plain to many that help was needed:

It is obvious that the complexity and difficulty of the tasks belonging to the current processes of educational change cannot be tackled without a continuous exchange of ideas and information, or without comparative studies. (Sandi, 1992, p.93 - Romania)

and particularly perhaps in vocational education:

One of the most interesting areas of 'learning from abroad' is vocational education...The reason is simple: [the former communist countries] expect to find out which training system best fits for the transition from a planned economy to a market one... (Anweiler, 1992, p.38)

However, there was an uneasy feeling that radical change might be uncomfortable within the large vocational education sector:

...the logical step of reducing the unjustified huge number of 'industrial lyceums' (secondary vocational education) is encountering the harsh resistance of thousands of engineering teachers afraid of losing their easy, not too demanding jobs. (Sandi, p.90)

Then again, a forward agenda was needed if advantage was to be taken of the aid from abroad that was now becoming available:

In some spheres the possibility of help from the West appeared and we had to have ideas of how to use it. (Janowski, p.50)

On the other hand there was much else to attend to. Educational reform seemed hardly a priority; education in general, and vocational education in particular, had by many accounts been one of the strengths of communist system (Barr, 2005). There was no need to rush matters.

But events would take a hand – both the forces of nature brought about by economic transition and the more deliberate pressures resulting from moves to join the European Union. We deal with these in Chapters Five and Six. But before we take up the story let us find out what had been going on in the West. What kind of VET policy did the EU have to offer the new East as it sought to find its way in a much changed world?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A CONCOCTION IS PREPARED:

#### The EU's Policy on Vocational Education and Training

##### Introduction

In November 2002, less than two years before the first eastern countries were to join the Union, European ministers of vocational education and training met in Copenhagen and drew up a 'declaration' which announced their "aim to increase voluntary cooperation in vocational education and training, in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications" (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and European Commission, 2002, p.2).

The informed observer might have noticed two rather odd things about this declaration, which started a process which lasted for the next decade. First, one might ask why the 'common vocational training policy' promised in the 1957 Treaty of Rome had migrated to 'voluntary co-operation' for the purposes of 'transparency' and the 'recognition of competences'. And second one might have noted that of the 31 ministers gathered in Copenhagen over half were not from member states of the EU. Indeed, although representatives from the Commission were present, the meeting was not an EU one at all, but included – as equal members – not only a range of 'candidate countries' but also three countries, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, who had at the time no intention of joining the EU at all.

How had this come about? This chapter charts the state of EU policy on VET as it stood in the early 1990s, and as it developed up until around 2005. This is the period during which the eastern European countries came into the ambit of the EU and subsequently achieved membership. First we will sketch the main milestones in VET policy since the beginning of the Community and then look in more detail at the main strands of policy at the time of the engagement with the East. The chapter ends with a discussion of the policy approaches and what the assessment of the evolution of policy on VET says about the different theories of EU integration set out in Chapter Two.

## **The main milestones in EU education and training policy**

The 1957 Treaty of Rome (European Economic Community, 1957) made no provision for education; it did, however, make an apparently strong provision for vocational training:

The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee [of the social partners] lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market. (Article 128, p 104)

Also relevant were the general provisions for “freedom of movement for workers” (Article 48), the progressive abolition of all “qualifying periods and other restrictions... regarding the free choice of employment other than those imposed on workers of the State concerned.” (Article 49) and – very specifically – provision in Article 57 for the Council of Ministers (the supreme legislative body of the Community) to “issue directives for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications”.

A number of years were to pass, however, before anything approaching a ‘common vocational training policy’ was to emerge and this was in the form of ten ‘common principles’ (Council of the European Communities, 1963). These principles were broadly conceived, for example “To bring about conditions that will guarantee adequate vocational training for all”, and “To promote basic and advanced vocational training and, where appropriate, retraining, suitable for the various stages of working life” (objectives under Principle 2). Worthy though these sentiments were, there was nothing very actionable at Community level since the main responsibility for implementation was deemed to rest with the member states:

A common vocational training policy means a coherent and progressive common action which entails that each Member State shall draw up programmes and shall ensure that these are put into effect in accordance with the general principles contained in this Decision... (Article One)

Little concrete action came from the common principles which “...were never enacted as legally binding regulation tools and never had a method of implementation attached to them” (Ertl, 2006, p.17). However, the Commission had the duty to carry out relevant research, to “collect

distribute and exchange any useful information” (Principle 5), to “draw up a list of training facilities and compare them with existing requirements with a view to determining what actions to recommend to the Member States” (Principle 4), and to “encourage direct exchanges of experience” (Principle 6). The one point of direct intervention was ambitious, though. This was for the Commission to:

...draw up in respect of the various occupations which call for specific training a standardised description of the basic qualifications required at various levels of training...[in order that] harmonisation of the standards required for success in final examinations should be sought... (Principle 8).

As we shall see, continuing efforts were made on this last point, but attempts by the Commission in the 1960s, to institute a community-funded transnational training programme for unemployed Italians seeking work in northern countries ran into severe opposition from a number of member states who considered this well outside the competence of the Commission and insisted that any such arrangements should be a matter of bilateral inter-governmental agreement. According to Petrini “This represented a complete failure of the Commission’s attempt to propose itself as motive force of a common vocational training policy” (2004, p.35); attempts at Community-level action on vocational training appear to have lapsed for a period.

The 1970s saw the first forays of the Community into the field of education (as opposed to vocational training). Partly this seems to have been due to a realization that little was being achieved through the Council of Europe (which had originally been seen as the vehicle for educational cooperation). Partly too, according to the *Official History* (European Commission, 2006b), it was a result of a common desire to stress the social, rather than merely the economic, functions of the Community and a desire in the Commission to widen the basis of EEC policies generally so as to avoid “restrictions on the natural development of the dynamism of the European Community” (p.64).

Given the lack of clear legal authority for any action by the EEC in this field, the mode selected was that of ‘co-operation’, and the first meetings of education ministers were styled, awkwardly, as ‘the Council and the ministers of education meeting within the Council’. Thinking was done, both by the Commission and by education ministers, as to what the role of

the Community in education might be, and the first central mechanisms for co-operation took shape – for example *Eurydice*, a descriptive database of education systems started in 1980; *Arion*, a programme of study visits for education administrators (1978); and *NARIC*, centres advising on equivalences of diplomas and study periods within higher education (1984). *Eurostat* started to compile education statistics on a EEC-wide basis in 1978.

There was, however, little action in vocational training, except for the establishment of a small programme (PETRA) in the late 1970s which had the object of establishing pilot projects and networks of vocational training providers. In addition the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) was established in 1975 as an agency for research and co-operation, but more specifically:

to encourage and support any initiative likely to facilitate a concerted approach to vocational training problems. The centre's activity in this respect shall deal in particular with the problem of the approximation of standards of vocational training with a view to the mutual recognition of certificates and other documents attesting completion of vocational training. (Council of the European Communities, 1975, Article 2.2)

The early 1980s saw an attempt to widen the vision of the Community to embrace the so called 'People's Europe' launched at the Fontainebleau Summit of 1984 (Council of the European Communities, 1984) which considered it:

essential that the Community should respond to the expectations of the people of Europe by adopting measures to strengthen and promote its identity and its image both for its citizens and for the rest of the world. (p.11)

The idea of a 'People's Europe' encouraged the Commission to establish its new education and training programmes on a substantially larger scale – these, after all, would affect the people of Europe directly rather than relying on the intermediation of member states. Not surprisingly there was opposition amongst the more 'euro-sceptic' member states (particularly Denmark), who challenged the legal basis for centrally run programmes in this field, given that the Treaty of Rome made no mention of education. The Commission, however, was relieved by the 1985 *Gravier* judgement of the European Court of Justice which held that vocational training (which,

unlike education more generally, was plainly included in the Treaty) included:

Any form of education which prepares for a qualification for a particular profession, trade or employment or which provides the necessary skills for such a profession, trade or employment... (European Commission, 2006b, p.102)

As a result of this, much of higher education, at least, was in scope to EU actions. Various programmes were launched, including *Erasmus* in higher education and *Leonardo* in the vocational education area. These continue, though differently grouped, slightly amended and considerably expanded, to this day.

The 1980s also saw developments in the field of the mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates, a field which was plainly in scope to the Community, and which was central to one of its main tenets – the freedom of movement of workers. Two Directives were issued: one concerning Higher Education Diplomas (Council of the European Communities, 1989), shortly followed by a complementary version for occupations with lower and shorter duration training requirements (Council of the European Communities, 1992).

The contested legal basis for Community action in education was resolved in the 1992 *Treaty of Maastricht*. This introduced an Article (126) which clearly permitted joint action in the field of education “while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and cultural and linguistic diversity” (European Union, 1992). A parallel article – replacing Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome – was introduced in respect of vocational training. This required that

The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training. (Article 127)

It can be seen that this was rather more narrowly based than the equivalent in the Treaty of Rome, including now the principle of ‘subsidiarity’ (whereby the Community only did things which could not be done at a lower level). The Article also stated the aims of any Community action: to “facilitate adaptation to industrial changes,” to “improve initial and continuing training”; to “facilitate access...and encourage mobility of instructors and



trainees”; to “stimulate cooperation ... between educational or training establishments and firms”; and to “develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States.” Importantly, both Articles specified that action taken at Community level must exclude “any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States”.

Thus, although the Maastricht Treaty marked a step forward for the Commission in the field of education, on paper at least it embodied a restriction of its powers in respect of VET. To be fair, though, those wider powers had scarcely been used in the previous 35 years.

A fresh urgency in both education and training was heralded by the Commission’s *White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* (European Commission, 1993b) – the ‘Delors’ White Paper – which responded to rising concern about jobs and economic growth across the Union. For the first time in Community policy the White Paper invoked the importance of education and training in securing economic growth; in particular it introduced the notion of lifelong learning (though this had been in currency in earlier OECD and UNESCO publications):

All measures must ... be based on the *concept of developing, generalizing and systematizing lifelong learning and continuing training*. This means that education and training systems must be reworked in order to take account of the need ... for the *permanent recomposition and redevelopment of knowledge and know-how*. (p.120, italics as in original)

The White Paper called for much action by member states. At Community level it proposed that there should be action:

to improve the quality of training and to foster innovation in education by increasing exchanges of experience and information on good practices and developing joint projects; to establish a genuine European area of - and market in - skills and training by increasing the transparency, and improving the mutual recognition, of qualifications and skills; to promote European-level mobility among teachers, students and other people undergoing training... to develop common databases and knowledge on skills needs; to conduct comparative research on methodologies used and policies implemented; to improve the interoperability of systems of distance learning and to increase the level of standardization of the new decentralized multi-media training tools, etc. (p.122)

Though lengthy, this was a fairly 'technical' list, confined in the main to things that the Community had done before and to items which member states could not readily undertake on their own. However the Commission also proposed that:

...the Community should *set firmly and clearly the essential requirements and the long-term objectives for measures and policies in this area* in order to make it easier to develop a new model for growth, competitiveness and employment in which education and training play a key role... (p.122, italics as in original)

The idea of having a collective forward agenda, tied to objectives, across of all of education and training, would prove to be significant.

Some more specific ideas were proposed in a further *White Paper on Teaching and Learning* (European Commission, 1995). Here we find proposals such as a European accreditation system for skills, including key skills and a template for personal skills cards (p.35) embodying "more flexible ways of acknowledging skills" (p.34). A European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), already in embryo form in higher education, would be replicated in VET (p.35). Mobility of apprentices between countries would be promoted, supported by a European apprentice/trainee charter (p.41). A European Voluntary Service Scheme would be set up, support for a network of "second chance" schools would be given (p.44), and "quality guarantee systems" including a "European Quality Label" would be made available for the teaching of European languages (p.48). This White Paper was heralded as breaking new ground (Hake, 1999). In the sense that the Commission was now talking explicitly about education, this was indeed new. But the proposals themselves in retrospect were a rather motley list. Hake is a little cruel in his verdict, but perhaps not too wide of the mark:

The grand goal of a transparent and dynamic system of lifelong learning across the European Union disappears in a set of second-hand proposals based more upon a European initial education system of yesterday rather than contributing to a new Europe for the 21st century... (p.67)

However if the education initiatives seemed modest and fragmented a much more robust approach was taken in the field of employment. The European Employment Strategy was launched in 1997; as well as the usual fine words, the strategy contained a mode of working involving the setting of overall targets, the production of action plans by each member

state, the joint review of these, based on assessments by the Commission, and statistical monitoring of results. Publication of material accompanied each stage (European Commission, 2006a). VET was clearly relevant, but initially was largely confined to training for unemployed people as part of 'active labour market policies'.

In 1998, quite outside the ambit of the Community and a surprise according to the *Official History* (p.197), the *Sorbonne Declaration* was made by the higher education Ministers of France, Germany, the UK and Italy. These countries proposed "progressive harmonisation of the overall framework of [higher education] degrees and cycles". We may note that this went beyond the powers of the Community in the Maastricht Treaty, so when the declaration was refined in 1999 in Bologna "the word 'harmonisation' was not included" (p.197). Though technically outside the Community ambit (30 countries associated themselves with Bologna) the development was significant in showing what could be achieved:

Bologna changed the paradigm: it was no longer simply a question of mobility and cooperation, but rather of convergence between systems. In a way, Bologna anticipated the direction of the new economic and social strategy that the Heads of State or Government were to adopt in March 2000 in Lisbon. (European Commission, 2006b, p.29)

The Lisbon Summit of 2000 appeared to revive, endorse and give some operational effectiveness to the broad vision of the 1993 Delors White Paper. It followed it too, in placing education (and, perhaps more naturally, vocational training) in the service of economic imperatives. It set:

*a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.* (Lisbon European Council, 2000, p.2 italics as in original)

According to the communiqué:

Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. They will have to offer learning and training opportunities tailored to target groups at different stages of their lives: young people, unemployed adults and those in employment who are at risk of seeing their skills overtaken by rapid change. (p.8)

This might seem familiar rhetoric, but then (p.9) we have more specific targets, not all of which are jobs to be done at the Community level, including “a substantial increase in per capita investment in human resources”, a halving, by 2010, of the number of 18-24 year olds with only lower secondary education who are not in further education and training and “schools and training centres, all linked to the Internet, ... accessible to all...” Reflection on further “concrete future objectives of education systems” was remitted to the Council of Education Ministers.

The *Lisbon Strategy* was noteworthy in highlighting education for economic purposes. But this was not new (cf. the earlier Delors White Paper). It was noteworthy, too, for attempting to set an agenda, not just for the Community institutions, but for the several member states, though – as we have seen – many previous documents since the original *Common Principles* of 1963 had indulged in similar rhetorical flourishes. What was an innovation at EU level was the idea of setting specific (or fairly specific) targets and, even more significantly, to establish a procedure for following these up. As we have noted this had applied in the *Employment Strategy* since 1997, but at Lisbon it was enshrined as the preferred working method. This was the so-called “open method of coordination as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals” which involved:

- fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;
- establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different member states and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;
- translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;
- periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes. (Lisbon European Council, 2000, p.12)

By 2000, therefore, the member states appeared committed not only to achieving improvements, and ‘convergence’, in education and training, but also to the idea that their actions (or lack of them) would be followed up, compared with others and publicly reported on – with a commentary by the

Commission which did not hesitate to point out where progress was not as anticipated.

The Education Ministers duly reported back and further “concrete objectives” were adopted (Council of the European Communities, 2002). There were now 13 objectives for education and training, though in many cases indicators of success were yet to be developed.

In parallel the Commission organized a consultation (which included the eastern European countries) on the concept of lifelong learning in its *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (European Commission, 2000), reporting back a year later (European Commission, 2001). This highlighted six priorities: mutual recognition of qualifications; information, guidance and counselling; access to education and training; more investment in lifelong learning; development of basic skills; and the development of new training methods. It suggested that the “open method of coordination” be applied in these areas as well (p.25).

Surprisingly soon after these two sets of proposals the Commission undertook a stock-take of the education and training situation, not only in member states, but also in the various countries which at the time were candidates for accession. As a result it concluded that:

efforts are being made in all the European countries to adapt the education and training systems to the knowledge-driven society and economy, but the reforms undertaken are not up to the challenges and their current pace will not enable the Union to attain the objectives set. (European Commission, 2003, p.3)

The Commission noted that “the date of 2010 is getting closer and closer” [p.4 *sic*] and called for national strategies and “coherent action plans”. It declared:

the urgent nature of the challenges to be faced means we have to use the open method of coordination to the full – while fully complying with the principle of subsidiarity (p.4)

The threat of using the open method “to the full” was manifested in a requirement for annual reports on progress from each country (later amended to be biennial).

A broader follow-up to Lisbon was made by a ‘High Level Group of Experts’ headed by Wim Kok, which reported in November 2004. It too considered that progress was too slow, and asked for annual guidelines and reports on

economic growth and jobs, which of course included relevant education measures. Interestingly, the findings about lack of commitment to the Lisbon goals were “an assessment that seems to be more valid for 'core European countries' than for the accession states of central and Eastern Europe” (Ertl, 2006, p.22).

In parallel (again) the model of *Bologna* for higher education was carried over to VET. The Copenhagen Declaration (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and European Commission, 2002) called for more mobility and cooperation, the creation of a single framework for the various instruments which aided mobility within the EU, as well as pushing forward ideas for increasing ‘transparency’ of qualifications including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and “common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training” (p.3). The ensuing ‘Copenhagen Process’ continued through the rest of the decade, and involved the eastern European candidate countries from the start.

### **The situation in the run-up to accession of the eastern countries**

It will be helpful briefly to pluck out from the historical narrative the various strands of Community VET policy in the period 1990-2005 when the eastern European countries were preparing for accession.

#### Policy

We can detect two strands of policy – first the business of establishing EU-wide objectives, and second the creation of Community-wide mechanisms which would aid the achievement of those objectives. This type of thinking, falling short of the banned ‘harmonization’ but going further than the vague ‘co-operation’, was beginning to emerge at the beginning of our period as exemplified in suggested *Guidelines for Community Action in the Field of Education and Training*, presented by the Commission in May 1993, some six months before the Delors White Paper:

...Community action is developing and should continue to develop at 3 levels:

- the encouragement of well-structured cooperation between the education and training systems;
- the promotion of quality through innovation by exchanges of information and experience; and
- the launching of specific direct actions on a community-wide basis, where there is a clear advantage over action only at a national level.

...Community action should seek to give a strong multiplier effect to the promotion of innovations which aim to improve the quality of education and training and set higher standards or new targets. These efforts should focus on problems of common concern identified in collaboration with Member States..." (European Commission, 1993a, pp.9-10)

The Commission seemed clear about the overall aim:

... the Community's vocational training policy should be designed to support and complement measures developed by and in the Member States, with a view to setting higher training standards and also creating a transparent European area so far as skills and qualifications are concerned.... The Community should design a coherent framework to help implement its vocational training policy and at the same time give a European dimension to the arrangements made by the Member States. (p.17, emphasis as in original)

One can see, over the ensuing decade, a tightening up of the two strands of setting "higher standards or new targets" on the one hand, and of "creating a transparent European area" in the field of skills on the other. The first was to be secured through "well-structured cooperation" and the second aided by particular "specific direct actions on a community-wide basis".

In terms of the "higher standards and targets", for which the *Guidelines* were searching, we can see a progression in the following decade: the Delors *White Paper* introduced the issue; a model for action was developed through the *Employment Strategy*; and the *Lisbon Strategy* broadened the framework to apply to the full field of VET, linking it with a whole range of other, mainly economic, objectives. Jobs, economic growth, productivity and the role of lifelong learning became the guiding stars – forming the EU's contribution to a "global discourse ...of human capital investment, skills formation and lifelong learning" which involved other supranational organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD and the World Bank (Taylor and Henry, 2007, p.112). Thus policy on training, and education more broadly, was largely framed in terms of economic needs. Social cohesion was avowed, throughout, as a parallel aim though commentators from both

eastern and western Europe seem clear that it was subordinate (Dehmel, 2006; Kuhn and Sultana, 2006; Strietska-Ilina, 2007b). Dale and Robertson (2006), however, make the point that under 'third way' thinking social cohesion is necessary for sustainable economic growth, and growth is necessary for a socially cohesive society.

The "coherent framework" offered by the *Lisbon Strategy* went wider than the more traditional vision of 'vocational training' (to use the term of the Treaty of Rome) which was originally conceived primarily as a tool to facilitate the matching of workers to individual slots in the labour market and to allow them to adapt to re-structured industries. The *Strategy*, instead, adopted the model of knowledge and skills, via increased productivity, as a key factor in enabling trading blocs to compete against each other. Given this rationale, the case for investment spills over from 'vocational training' to education as a whole, and here the concept of 'lifelong learning' is helpful precisely because it shifts talk about education from the "...institutionalised and ordered sequences" rooted in national education systems "...to become a new fluid, flexible and cross-national phenomenon" (Lawn, Rinne and Grek, 2011, pp.15-16). It also places the individual centre-stage in acquiring learning, to be encouraged and facilitated by employers and governments, but ultimately responsible for his or her own destiny (Kuhn and Sultana, 2006).

In terms of the trajectory of "creating a transparent European area" of skills the 1990s were marked by a move from the rather woolly identifying of "problems of common concern" and "exchanges of information and experience" to more 'concrete' (to use a favourite Community term) "specific direct instruments on a community-wide basis" aimed at stimulating mobility across vocational education and training within Europe. The *Copenhagen Declaration* had the aim, not so much of increasing the volume and universality of VET (which was the thrust under the *Lisbon Strategy*), but rather to create a 'space' or 'common area' for VET in the same manner as was being undertaken for higher education under *Bologna*. Thus the *Declaration* referred to a "European education and training area" (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and European Commission, 2002, p.2) and aspired to promote "action similar to the Bologna-process, but adapted to the field of vocational education and training" (p.2).



Like *Bologna*, the *Copenhagen Process* gave rise to a work programme interspersed with regular summits.\* Again like *Bologna*, the ‘process’ included European countries which were not in the EU (by 2010 Croatia, the FYR of Macedonia, Iceland, Turkey, Liechtenstein, and Norway). This work programme resulted in a series of EU-wide ‘instruments’, including, a revised *Europass* (a standard way of setting out vocational achievements) issued in 2005, a *European Qualifications Framework* in 2008, a template for a *European Credit System for VET* (ECVET) in 2008 and the *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET* in 2009. Work to develop these instruments was underway in the period immediately before the accession of the eastern European countries.

### The Mode of Cooperation

The search for a “higher standards and new targets” which all member states could sign up to was one thing. To implement it was quite another. How could one prevent distractions appearing as had happened so frequently in the past where:

...successive Presidencies ... influenced the political agenda by adding their national priorities, which did not always make for continuity in the Community's work. (European Commission, 2006b, p.192)

and above all how could one hold the various member states to acting on the commitments they had made, as the cooperation process:

...depend[ed] largely on the willingness and commitment of the Member States to take account, at national level, of the common objectives that they had fixed for themselves at European level. (European Commission, 2006b, p.32)

The answer, as we have seen, was the ‘open method of coordination’ first used in the *Employment Strategy* in the late 1990s, and enshrined as the preferred method for collective action at Lisbon.

This method was familiar in some countries. It was perhaps a transatlantic import (Grek and Rinne, 2011), derived from older ‘Management by Objectives’ traditions and applied more widely to government in the influential *Reinventing Government* (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993) which

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\* A veritable tour of European cities – Maastricht, 2004; Helsinki, 2006; Bordeaux, 2008; and Bruges, 2010.

was popular with 'third way' thinkers in the Clinton and Blair administrations. This approach seemed to accommodate the hitherto conflicting desires of achieving collective progress within a regime of 'subsidiarity'; to achieve 'convergence' without the banned 'harmonization'; to respect 'decentralization' while achieving aims for the EU as whole. It was a mode of operation to which the eastern countries would be expected to conform – the idea of central targets would hardly be novel for them, but the concomitant open accounting for progress towards them would be something entirely new.

### The Programmes

A brief mention has been made of the education and training programmes operated at Community level. These were re-structured in the middle of our decade (1994/5). *Socrates* dealt with schools and higher education, while *Leonardo* focussed on vocational education and training.

*Leonardo* operated principally through three modes: supporting individual exchanges of students and teachers/trainers; supporting 'innovative' projects which involved partners in a number of different countries; and the establishment of networks to exchange information and practice. A large number of activities were eligible; the original programme had a rather cumbersome 19 objectives including, for example, the promotion of equal opportunities, vocational guidance, and "to develop the European dimension in training" (European Commission, 2006b, p.172). These were subsequently rationalized to three overarching objectives at the time of the renewal of the programme in 2000.

In 1998, around the mid-point of our period, *Leonardo* was running at €140m per annum, and the education and training programmes collectively at around €400m (European Commission, 2006b, p.273). In the scale of things this was not large, amounting to less than 0.5 per cent of the total EU budget and less than five per cent of the European Social Fund (p.182). Nonetheless the Commission had considerable trouble getting the budgets it wanted in the face of reluctance on the part of the member states. The bulk of *Leonardo* money went on continuing vocational training and other lifelong learning projects, as opposed to initial vocational education; 75 per cent was spent on transnational projects, with less than 20 per cent on

individual exchanges and six per cent on related research (European Commission, 1997c).

Though small, one should not dismiss these programmes as incidental. There were two important side effects – one personal and the other political. At the personal level a considerable number of people were involved; according to the *Official History* (p.180), 77,000 ‘partners’ were involved in *Leonardo* transnational projects in the period 1995-9, and 127,000 students and 11,000 trainers took part in exchanges or work placements in other countries. Including *Socrates*, by 1992 some 6-7% of all EU students could expect to participate in exchanges at some point (Stein and Kurtz-Newell, (1995, p.148). Though most of these were in higher education, and perhaps therefore targeted future elites rather than ordinary ‘citizens’ (Field and Murphy, 2006), the influence of this very personal experience of the ‘European Dimension’ should not be underestimated. One might expect this to have been particularly well received by the formerly restricted eastern European countries, which were – through an enlightened decision – granted access to these programmes in 1997, well before their accession (European Commission, 1997c, p.56).

At the political level the programmes were a way of allowing the Commission to interact directly with professionals in the various member states, rather than just policymakers. In the enthusiastic words of the *Official History*:

[The programmes’] strength lay in the fact that they were implemented at the closest possible level to the education and training players on the ground and were effective catalysts and multipliers of the European dimension in education and training. Since they were hotbeds of transnational innovation and experimentation in Europe they were increasingly cited as an example of what the Community could best do for its citizens in response to their expectations of a Europe closer to their needs. (p.26)

This effect on the ‘players’ is confirmed by Rasmussen (2006):

In general Danish attitudes towards EU involvement in matters of education and culture are becoming more positive. This is partly because ... many institutions and organisations have over the years been awarded grants from EU programmes or participated in EU-funded networks. (p.63)

In short, the programmes may well have delivered a lot of ‘bang for their bucks’ in gaining the Commission allies amongst practitioners, stimulating

them to put 'bottom-up' pressure on their policymakers, thus adding to the top-down pressures of the 'open method of coordination'.

Finally a word should be said about the sizeable European Social Fund (ESF). In the latter half of the 1990s, training amounted to nearly 75 per cent of ESF expenditure (European Commission, 1997c, p.115). The fund requires that its expenditures should add to training spending in a member state rather than substitute for government resources. It aims to direct this additional expenditure to regions and people who are disadvantaged or who are particularly prone to the effects of economic change. However the nature and quality of the training interventions made are entirely the prerogative of the member states, and indeed it is likely that the shares of the ESF that accrue to each member state are largely determined by political considerations rather than objective criteria of need or the nature of training (Allen, 2005).

It is perhaps debatable as to whether the ESF should be counted as part of the EU vocational education and training policy. The Commission has little influence over the type of training it is spent on, or indeed on the degree to which it is spent on training as opposed to other measures to achieve social integration – in the late 1990s the proportion spent on training ranged from 93 per cent in Denmark and Sweden to only 36 per cent in France. The fund is clearly not viewed by the central EU authorities as a tool for transmitting education policy but rather as an aspect of regional policy and support for disadvantaged people. However, as we shall see, the ESF was an important factor for the eastern European countries; though they only gained access to it on accession, preparation for taking on the responsibility for administering the fund was an important part of their 'capacity building' in the run-up to full membership.

#### *Mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates*

This is a rather specific policy topic concerning the recognition of diplomas *for purposes of professional mobility*, rather than (as is the case with measures such as ECTS and ECVET) recognition for purposes of continuing study or mobility between education and training institutions in different countries.

Unlike other areas of education and training this is one where 'hard law' can apply at the Community level, as it deals with mobility of labour on which the Treaty is unambiguous. The 'mutual recognition' Directives apply in cases where a diploma or certificate is required in a certain country for the practice of a particular occupation or profession. In such cases some mechanism is needed whereby someone who has trained to an equivalent level in another country may satisfy, or partially satisfy, the requirements applying in the country to which they are transferring. Originally this was pursued on a profession-by-profession basis, with agreements across member states about what counted as equivalent qualifications. This, however, was a tortuous business and became slower as the number of member states expanded. The *General Directives* adopted in 1989 and 1992 (page 64 above) resolved this problem by placing a duty on member states to adopt procedures in respect of each of their 'regulated professions' whereby either they recognized equivalent qualifications gained in other member states or laid down what supplementary training was required (Council of the European Communities, 1992, Article 7).

Outside the regulated professions the original hope was that there might be 'harmonization' of training – *i.e.* that training standards for any given occupation would be the same across the EU. It was plain at an early stage that this was unrealistic and in the event appeared to be expressly forbidden by the *Maastricht* Treaty, so the search instead became one for 'equivalences'. As we have seen (page 63) this was one of the tasks for which CEDEFOP was set up. A large exercise was started in the 1980s to "undertake work... on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the various Member States, in respect of specific occupations or groups of occupations" (Council of the European Communities, 1985, Article 2). This work included, *inter alia* the "drawing up mutually agreed Community job descriptions" and "matching the vocational training qualifications recognized in the various Member States with the job descriptions" in order to draw up, for each occupation, a table showing the relevant vocational qualification in each member state (Article 3). This proved a Sisyphean task on which the *Official History* gallantly reports:

Under [CEDEFOP's] aegis, dozens of tripartite groups of experts met to try to draw up correspondence tables for skilled workers in the various occupations. While questions did arise once the work had been completed as to the practical value of the tables so produced, Cedefop's work

contributed greatly to promoting a European approach in training. (European Commission, 2006b, pp.233-4)

Nothing seems to remain of this task – the scale of which, with currently 28 Members, constant updating of vocational qualifications, and flexibility of job descriptions, would surely now boggle the mind. But the scarring experience on those involved no doubt encouraged the move away from the idea of ‘equivalences’ towards that of ‘transparency’, which is the flag under which the *European Qualifications Framework* flies; the idea is that, through the EQF, employers and individuals should more readily be able to estimate the nature and level of training for themselves rather than to rely on officially produced tables or ‘harmonized’ training standards.

### **The search for a policy framework**

The preceding survey is bound to leave the reader a bit puzzled. The Community’s policy has included everything from ringing statements that “every person should receive adequate training, with due regard for freedom of choice of occupation, place of training and place of work” (Council of the European Communities, 1963, Principle One) to proposals in the *Teaching and Learning White Paper* for “setting up a mechanism to enhance and brand educational software” (European Commission, 1995, p.36). A cynic might say that policy has veered between initiatives that no-one will do anything about and those which no-one wants in the first place.

Underlying this volatility of scope has been an uncertainty, disagreement and manoeuvring about the very nature of what policy *at the Community level* should look like. Should an EU policy attempt to summarize the aspirations of member states (as the *Common Principles* did, and many other utterances over the years have done)? The issue here, of course, is how to close the loop between aspiration and fulfilment. At national level the delivery of promises is – at least in part – safeguarded by elections, an active press and opposition parties. At Community level, such mechanisms are largely absent and so such rhetoric comes very cheaply. We can see the ‘open method of co-ordination’ as an attempt to inject a reality-check, demanding that aspirations are at least made concrete and monitored.

On the other hand, perhaps the role of the Community is to attempt to search for and spread good practice in areas of common interest, using a

comparative approach. This has been a strong feature of Community policy in the field of VET for many years, as evidenced by the continuing backing for CEDEFOP, and the support for 'innovative projects' under the Commission's education and training programmes. But there is no guarantee that – even if identified – good practice will actually be adopted.

A further interpretation of the proper role of an EU-wide policy is that it should identify critical Community mechanisms which will foster a 'single market' in education and training, with the benefit – as in other market areas – of offering greater consumer choice and of fostering increased quality and efficiency in education and training services. We can see this thinking operating in the encouragement of student mobility and fostering of credit transfer. We might also detect it in the enthusiasm for distance learning (which has been a minor, but long-standing, feature of EU education policy), as this is obviously not dependent on national boundaries. However, mandating the use of such mechanisms would run up against the limits of the Treaties; they can only be instituted on a voluntary basis.

Again, perhaps the main purpose of a policy at the EU level should be to introduce a 'European Dimension' into education and training. This has been a feature in the field of education, rather than training, with early efforts, for example, to establish University chairs in European studies, or – more modestly – to produce common 'European' teaching materials. The programmes of education and training exchanges can also be seen in this cultural light. But there are clearly national sensitivities in this area, with many countries wary of attempts to develop European, rather than national, elements in the curriculum. While the *Lisbon Strategy* attempted to create a sense of pan-European identity, this was not so much in the cultural sense, but rather that of a single economic trading bloc which needed to deal collectively with economic realities.

One interpretation of the evolution of community VET policy is that it has swung between these various axes in an unpredictable manner, influenced by myriad forces as Field and Murphy (2006) describe:

A variety of policy actors has been involved, each of which has sought to pursue its own interests while repositioning itself as a player on the European level ... with individual actors forming strategic and tactical alliances with others to promote their own preferred policy solutions... And the

difficulties of coordination, definition (scope) and agency mean that policy accomplishment is an extremely uncertain and complex process. (p.78)

The similarity with Kingdon and Ball's conception of the policy process as a 'primeval soup' of competing policies (see page 37 above) is unmistakable.

### **The nature of the European integration process in the case of VET**

What can be said about the degree and nature of European 'integration' in VET, and which of the models for achieving integration seem most readily to explain the process?

It is plain that the economic rationale for broader and deeper EU integration has been significant in setting the context for VET. The EU started explicitly as an 'Economic Community' and its further deepening as a 'Single Market' has been driven by a clear economic rationale. However despite the express inclusion of vocational training in the original treaty and its obvious relevance to issues of employment, productivity and labour mobility, concerted action on VET was at best sporadic in the first three decades of the Community's existence. The re-emphasis on economic co-ordination in the 1990s gave a new impetus to Community actions on VET, but at a very general level, focussed more on the broadest interpretation of 'lifelong learning' than on any development of a distinctive, integrated 'European' model of VET.

For those, like Anderson (2009), who would emphasize the growing pre-eminence of capital over labour in the evolution of the Single Market, there must be a challenge to explain the complete absence of pressure from European multi-national employers towards the achievement of common standards (and levels of financing) of training, which must surely have been very much in their interests, but which – as we have seen – came to nothing despite some well-meaning official efforts.

So, while undeniably forming the context of many EU VET actions, it seems unrealistic to claim that the Community's VET policy was principally driven by economic interests and imperatives. Indeed it would surely be fanciful to conceive that it has been "the interests and strategies of the dominant national, regional and transatlantic social forces" (Cafruny and Ryner, 2009,



p.237) which has resulted in the European Qualifications Framework or *Europass* – one would imagine that such forces, if they exist, would have rather more important business to be getting on with.\*

Much has been made by the ‘globalization’ school of the claim that the EU’s policy on lifelong learning, in particular, has been influenced by the burgeoning ‘neo-liberalism’ of the 1990s, and that a more educationally progressive UNESCO vision of the 1970s has been corrupted in favour of a narrower, vocationally-orientated alternative, which – however – retains the emancipatory rhetoric of the former. For example, Borg and Mayo (2005) assert that:

The EU Memorandum on lifelong learning [of 2000] and a number of projects it inspired indicate, in no uncertain terms, the extent of the distortion that has occurred with respect to the once humanistic concept of lifelong education...Some of the humanistic considerations ...were co-opted in the service of a document seeking to provide a humanistic facade to what is, in effect, a neo-liberal inspired set of guidelines. (p.218)

They claim that this tendency was already apparent in the both the ‘Delors’ and the ‘Cresson’ White Papers of the 1990s. It seems rather fanciful however to attribute this lurch to neo-liberalism as having taken place under the auspices of two leading figures of the French Socialist Party,<sup>†</sup> and one suspects – instead – that the emphasis on vocational matters rested on the fact that the EU always had a clearer mandate, both legally and politically, over the vocational and employment-related sphere, than it did over the ‘humanistic’ territory of general education, which – as we have seen – was jealously guarded by member states. Indeed, far from ‘masking’ the vocational content of the Memorandum with nods to the importance of education, other authors consider that “...the EU was unusual amongst international organisations in maintaining a clear non-economic stand in its approach” (Holford and Mleczko, 2013, p.38).

The inter-governmental interpretation, holding that EU development is primarily a function of the interplay between the interests of independent

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\* Avis (2012) characterizes qualification frameworks as reflecting “...the impact of global conceptualisations rooted in neoliberalism” (p.7), though he gives no reasons as to why we should see them in this light. Perhaps the very fact that they have been taken up in many different countries is proof enough that their origin must lie in the (allegedly) equally global ‘neo-liberalism’.

<sup>†</sup> Unless, of course, they were early victims of the emergent social imaginary.

member states which can either prompt or prevent integration, evidently is a powerful explanation of certain critical milestones in the Community's VET policy, both negative and positive. We can see it operating negatively in the restrictions on the Community's education programmes in the 1980s, in limiting EU competence in the field of VET in the *Maastricht Treaty* and perhaps also in explaining the hesitant progress in the years after *Lisbon*. Certain positive impetuses have also resulted from inter-governmental initiatives, most notably the *Sorbonne Declaration* of 1998 which gave rise to the *Bologna* process for higher education and in the *Copenhagen* process of common instruments for VET. Both were inter-governmental initiatives going wider than the EU.

Though carefully orchestrated by the Commission, the Lisbon Summit seems also to have required a particular configuration of powerful governmental interests in order to give real effect to the Delors White Paper of seven years earlier. Indeed, these examples would support Milward's (1992) interpretation of governments using supranational institutions and programmes to pursue domestic goals which might be politically difficult to promote on a purely national basis: *Sorbonne* was used by the original participating governments to "kick-start domestic reform agendas" in higher education (Knodel and Walkenhorst, 2010, p.138), and it seems likely that *Lisbon's* instigation of the 'open method of co-ordination' was helpful to some governments in achieving labour market reform which they might have hesitated to pursue alone.

However, while it might be useful in explaining the more dramatic blocks and breakthroughs, inter-governmentalism would not seem to be a powerful explanation for the more gradual developments – the slow elaboration of the different Community education programmes, the evolution of *Copenhagen's* common instruments, or the decision to substitute general protocols for mutual recognition of diplomas for the more specific ones. True, governments had no very powerful objections to these evolutionary developments, but they do not seem to have played a significant part in proposing them.

At the working level one can see distinct evidence for the constructivist interpretation. The Commission's education programmes gave material benefits, not only financial but also in terms of widening interests and career opportunities, to education and training practitioners and to relevant

researchers, as well as to the students who participated in them. This had the effect of stimulating an interest in European policies and in the possibilities of acting on a transnational stage amongst specialists. It may have begun to synthesize concepts and methodologies in a distinctively European way amongst technical circles resulting in something of an epistemic community (Adler and Haas, 1992). The emergence of a professional consensus has become more marked – though far from universal – in the collaborative work undertaken to develop the common instruments under the *Copenhagen* process as well as amongst the data specialists who underpinned the *Lisbon* process (Lawn and Segerholm, 2011).

However the alignment of national policymakers at the official level with a pan-European VET technical community is a recent development which may well prove fragile, and does not seem to have stretched to the political class. Anderson's interpretation of colluding national elites, appears, in the field of VET at least to be more to do with consensus amongst working level experts than the higher echelons of policymakers. There are signs, though, that this working level co-operation may be resulting in some distinctive 'European' features of VET systems, particularly in the field of qualifications and curriculum development. And the open method of co-ordination does seem to have introduced a new and acceptable 'middle way' of governance, somewhere between unpalatable central Directives and ineffective exhortations for co-operation, which promotes a convergence of goals while allowing a divergence of practice (Dale and Robertson, 2006). On the face of it this kind of governance regime seems appropriate for EU, which is neither a government nor merely an association of countries, though whether its peculiar balance can be maintained in the starker environment of a single currency remains to be seen.

Finally there is the neo-functionalist explanation. Between the occasional inter-governmental *démarches* we have seen constant pressure from the Commission to establish a distinctive agenda in VET. These initiatives have varied considerably – ideas for transnational training schemes in the 1960s, programmes of financial grants in the 1980s, the discovery of the discourse of lifelong learning in the 1990s, and the attention to qualifications architecture from 2002. What is notable is that when one

avenue is blocked, the Commission has been diligent in trying to open up another. Although broadly from the constructivist camp, Dale and Derouet show how what could be construed as an exercise in mutual exploration might more realistically be seen as a process whereby the central institutions find a means of exerting influence and expanding their own roles.

In terms of the Treaty, education remains a Member State responsibility, with the EC's authority confined to vocational education. To get a foot in the door of education, it has had to follow a somewhat indirect route. It had first to construct a common goal – making Europe the leading knowledge economy in the world by 2010. Then, in pursuit of this objective, it laid out a common cognitive universe, based on common performance measures ... Then, once each society's knowledge of its own system was shaped by these measures, the Open Method of Coordination was installed – with common benchmarks of goals to be reached. (2012, p.422)

The neo-functionalist concept of 'spillover' is helpful as well. The *Gravier* judgement held that the competence of the Community in vocational training extended to higher education. The European Employment Strategy's open method of co-ordination 'spilled over' to VET and lifelong learning by the time of *Lisbon*. Similarly the approach towards higher education qualifications developed through *Bologna* was transferred to VET in the form of the EQF and ECVET. Within the *Copenhagen* instruments the concept of a European Qualifications Framework 'spilt-over' to the idea that, in order to engender 'mutual trust' in each other's qualifications, countries also needed to sign up to common principles for quality assurance.

### **Towards engagement with the East**

As we have seen, it was with a multi-dimensional, evolving and rather unsettled array of VET policies that the EU faced the newly attentive eastern European countries in the 1990s and early 2000s. If they were to fall in with EU VET policies it would seem that they would need to set objectives for lifelong learning, undergo monitoring of their implementation of them, take part in transnational programmes, conform with the rules of the European Social Fund, and assist in the development of the *Copenhagen* instruments.

We shall see, in due course, what demands were actually made, but clearly it was going to be hard to grasp the totality of the various measures. Even the *Official History* struggles a bit, reporting that in 2002 the Council required that:

...approaches and actions ... should form part of the 'Education and training 2010' process which is built around lifelong learning. Lifelong learning was also to be enhanced by the actions and policies developed within the European employment strategy, the action plan for skills and mobility ... the Socrates programme (in particular the Grundtvig action), the Community programmes Leonardo da Vinci and Youth, the eLearning initiative and the research and innovation actions." (European Commission, 2006b, p.229)

Making sense of this, let alone implementing it, was surely a challenge, even for sophisticated bureaucrats from eastern Europe, accustomed to the niceties of multi-faceted Five Year Plans.

On the other hand, the progressive rooting of EU VET (and indeed education) policy in an economic rationale presented a line of thinking which was far from alien to those formerly communist countries which had expanded education, and particularly vocational education, to help them attain technological prowess in the 1960s. The concept of lifelong learning, though, was problematic; if such terms had to "bear the weight of incomprehension" in many western countries (Lawn, Rinne and Grek, 2011, p.11), the concepts were more difficult for societies where industrial displacement and job mobility had been practically unknown.

However things were changing fast in the East and a reinforced case for change in VET was about to emerge. If the West had looked to VET to help it to respond to the challenge of "Growth, Competitiveness and Employment" (to use the title of the Delors White Paper of 1993), then the East would have every bit as much of an incentive to do the same.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A TURN FOR THE WORSE: Economic Transition

#### Introduction

The successes of communist education were well known, and the prevailing view in the early transition was that many aspects of education reform could wait. That view was wrong. (Barr, 2005, p.10)

When we left their story at the end of Chapter Three, the formerly communist countries of eastern Europe had emerged from the old regimes and were confronting their new world with a mixture of reaction to the past, optimism at new-found freedoms and hopes of prosperity. Apart from some changes to the curriculum to reflect the departure of the old official ideology and a limited exploration of some new (or, rather, revived) school types, there was no firm direction in education as a whole and still less in vocational education. Indeed there was a consensus that this area was not a priority, and could probably be left to the professionals.

As Barr says, that view proved wrong. Economic and social transition struck the countries in a way in which few anticipated and with ramifications for education that would present great challenges to what was seen as one of the few success stories of the communist era. Standing, as it did, at the juncture between education and the labour market, VET was in the eye of the storm as the changes in the economy were read across to the world of education.

Though the transition years are associated with the 1990s and early 2000s – the period between the fall of communism and the accession of ten eastern countries to the EU in 2004-7, these parameters inevitably simplify matters a bit. In the western Balkans it was warfare, ethnic divisions and the emergence of new nations, rather than economic transition, that characterized the period.\* And, as we saw in Chapter Three certain

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\* With the exception of Slovenia, economic transition from communism in the area encompassed by the former Yugoslavia was a stuttering process at best, and for many of the countries that emerged the transition process only really started in around 2000.

transition features could be detected prior to 1989 in some countries (page 56). Nevertheless these reforms were relatively small and other countries had not experienced any discernible softening of the communist line.

Furthermore, it is to an extent artificial to separate economic issues from those of accession (dealt with in the next chapter). For example, candidature for the EU involved a formal commitment to a market economy, which in turn made much of the trajectory of economic transition inevitable – “the accession policies reinforced the transition process to a market economy and largely eliminated the remnants of socialism” (Gebel, 2008, p.21). Maniokas (2004) goes further in believing that the EU’s stipulations about accession meant that “... the governments of the candidate countries ...lost control of their own agenda and priorities of action” (p.32).

However, the two issues – of transition and accession – are conceptually different and involved different forces; in the case of transition the impersonal ones of economic and social change, and in the case of accession more deliberate political choices and bureaucratic process. And while accession undoubtedly carried with it the need for economic transition, those forces would surely have affected the eastern countries whether or not they had joined the EU.

In tracking the effects of transition we start with broad economic and administrative issues, then look at changes in the labour market which these gave rise to before focussing on their implications the education systems as whole and finally on VET in particular.

### **Economic transition**

The main elements of economic transition need only to be sketched here. Though featuring at different times, at different speeds and sometimes in different orders, all the countries saw economic shocks comprising (Barr, 2005; Havrylyshyn and Nsouli, 2001):

- liberalization of prices (which were previously controlled), giving rise to a very different pattern of domestic demand;

- a gross change in international trading patterns, away from the ‘Council for Mutual Economic Assistance’ (CMEA)\* and towards the West, particularly the EU;
- large changes in the official exchange rate resulting first in floating rates, and for most countries from around 2000, a formal or informal peg to the Euro. In some countries this process was deliberately gradual, in others it was rapid. This too altered patterns of international trade and domestic consumption;
- the permitting, and (to varying extents) encouragement, of private enterprise including measures to disband collective farms and return lands to their original owners;
- the introduction of defined budgets and market-style accounting for state enterprises which for the first time enabled policymakers to see whether they were operating at a profit or a loss, and to take relevant measures in response – closure, adjustment, privatization or continuation under state control.

These policies were pursued both with different degrees of rigour and in rather different manners in the various countries. The ‘starting point’ also varied – for example the peasantry in Poland had never been compelled to collectivize, and the former Yugoslavia was not part of the CMEA; Slovenia already had extensive trading links with the West.

In terms of rigour, both Bulgaria and Romania were late starters and faltered in their dedication to full economic transition. In the mid-90s Bulgaria reverted to policies of bailing out loss-making state enterprises. It was never clear in Romania whether the fall of Ceaușescu had been the result of a popular revolution or of an internal coup, and the successor government of Iliescu was very equivocal about accepting foreign investment or restructuring industry; there was no internal consensus about reform until 1997 (Jeffries, 2002), and concerted action was delayed beyond that. Following its ‘velvet divorce’ from the Czech Republic in 1992, Slovakia showed signs of reversing economic reforms under the Mečiar government until this was replaced in 1998, arguably as a result of pressure from the EU (Rybář and Malova, 2004).

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\* Often styled as *Comecon*.



At the macro level one can contrast the differences between the 'big bang' policy of Poland, where reforms were introduced early and quickly, and the deliberately gradualist moves of Hungary which had a 'crawling' approach to realigning its exchange rate (Jeffries, 2002). Views amongst commentators differ as to whether rapid or gradual change was preferable; more important according to Barr (2005) was that policy should be sustained and consistently supported by government.

Dealing with the large state enterprises was a particularly fraught area, and one with significant labour market implications. Approaches differed substantially between countries. Jeffries (2002) contrasts the method of selling such concerns to foreign investors (the main course pursued in Hungary) with the alternative courses of distributing vouchers to the public at large (the Czech Republic) and encouraging management buy-outs or other forms of insider privatization such as in Bulgaria where '*nomenklatura* privatization' gave rise to widespread corruption under a system for "nationalizing losses and privatizing profits" (Jeffries, 2002, p.29).

Despite the variations, a good degree of commonality of outcome can be seen in the transition paths of the various countries. In economic terms the first effect was a sizeable reduction in output due largely to the disruption of external trade but also to the realignment of consumer demand to different goods and services. In all countries GDP fell sharply in the early years of the 1990s (EBRD, 2009), ranging from around 15-20 per cent in Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic to dramatic falls of 35-50 per cent in the Baltic states (which suffered most from the loss of trade within the former Soviet Union). In the mid-1990s growth resumed in all countries though many, and in particular those which had not determinedly pursued structural reforms, suffered a repeated bout of GDP reductions following the Russian and Asian economic crisis of 1997-8.

This setback meant that even after ten years not all countries could report that GDP had recovered to its 1989 levels. While Poland and Slovenia had markedly higher levels by 2000, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic States were still well under the levels they had achieved in socialist times. However the early years of the new century saw all countries making sustained gains in output.

Due to the 'monetary overhang' resulting from high nominal pay and low availability of consumer goods under communism, reinforced by the setting of pensions and out-of-work benefits on generous terms in the early days of the new era (Noelke, 2008), inflation became a problem in all countries with annual increases of over (and sometimes well over) 100 per cent everywhere except for Hungary at some point during the 1990s (Barr, 2005; EBRD, 2009).

Despite the variable progress in different countries, the growth of the private sector during the 1990s was very considerable. From typically only ten per cent of GDP in 1990 (though around a quarter in Hungary and Poland, due to private agriculture in the latter case), the private sector increased to account for over three-quarters of production by the end of the decade in most countries. Apart from the laggards of Bulgaria and Romania, which were due in any case quickly to catch up in this respect, the eastern European countries were typically as much, if not more, private sector orientated than the established member states by the time of their accession (Jeffries, 2002).

Public expenditure came under great pressure. Quite early in the process (and with the exception of Hungary) public expenditure as a proportion of GDP fell to below the average levels of the EU15 (Ringold, 2005).<sup>\*</sup> When combined with the sizeable reductions in GDP that we have already noted, and the fact that under communism many individuals' benefits and services derived from their (now defunct) employers, it is no surprise that a number of public services began to be run down, chiefly through allowing infrastructure to decay and reducing real wages for employees, and in some cases allowing their pay to fall drastically in arrears (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005). With pressure from international donors for beneficiary countries to adopt prudent fiscal regimes, and later from the EU to adhere to the deficit limits of the Stability and Growth Pact<sup>†</sup>, the scope to increase

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<sup>\*</sup> Eurostat publish a range of aggregations for the EU denoted by the numbers of countries the aggregated EU consists of. In this case we have taken the 'EU15' as representing the established EU before the accession of 12 new countries in 2004-7; the 10 eastern European joiners (often known at the time as CEECs) plus Malta and Cyprus. Data series for the EU15 include figures for Austria, Finland and Sweden for periods before they actually joined the EU in 1995.

<sup>†</sup> An agreement that countries would limit their budget deficits, particularly with a view to the introduction of the Euro, to which new entrants to the EU would – in principle at least – commit themselves to preparing to join.

public expenditure to allay the dire economic situation, to alleviate growing poverty, still less to renovate the infrastructure for the future, was extremely limited.

A further by-product of economic transition was the growth of the 'informal' economy. By its nature it is difficult to quantify, but the International Monetary Fund put typical eastern European levels at around 20 per cent of GDP at around the turn of the century (Camdessus, 2001). The existence of the informal economy had many repercussions, including – for our purposes – a reduction in the tax base from which public services like education were funded, distortion of official statistics on employment and unemployment, through to difficulties for jobseekers and students in citing quite genuine, but undocumented, work experience for the purpose of gaining qualifications through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

### **Public administration**

There were, of course, many changes and challenges in developing new administrative structures in the formerly socialist countries, not least of course in the very many territories which acquired national status for the first time or re-acquired it after a long interval.\* For our purposes two features need to be highlighted: the issue of administrative capacity and the trend towards decentralization.

The enormity of the removal of the Communist Parties which had acted not only as the political leadership but also as the key element in administration at all levels is hard for us now to comprehend. From there always being a plan, however deficient or unrealistic many might have thought it to be, now there was none, not even from the West, as the managing director of the International Monetary Fund later admitted:

At the outset of transition, little was clear, except that there was no turning back. There was no master plan and scarce relevant experience to guide action. (Camdessus, 2001, p.9)

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\* The 'new' countries in question were the three Baltic States, which had existed in the inter-war years, Serbia, which had been independent before the first world war, and the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Croatia which had arguably never before existed as nation-states.

Inside the countries the removal (in most cases) of the communist leadership resulted in a serious problem of capability within the administration. Commentators from the countries concerned tend to characterize the result as something of the worst of both the old and the new worlds, for example the combination of politicization with an inability to take decisions:

..administrations were underpoliticized in terms of policymaking capacity - weak executives - but overpoliticized in terms of personnel policies - politicization of the civil service. (Dimitrova, 2005, p.82)

and relics of the old system inappropriate for the new uncertainties:

...[a] bureaucratic logic, assuming a clear distinction between the decision makers and the executors of decisions, strict respect towards procedures, lack of initiative of the executors and very strong separations (both on the horizontal and vertical levels) of administrative structures, is acutely present in administrative institutions. (Hințea, Șandor and Junjan, 2004, p.153)

Far from attracting reformers into official positions, a number of the 'old guard' were left in post, with attendant problems:

Perhaps the biggest problem in the new members' bureaucracies is a lack of well-trained, experienced and motivated staff. Many of those with marketable skills ... have long since switched to better-paid jobs in the private sector. As a result, those stuck in underpaid civil service jobs are often poorly trained and motivated. Many supplement their meagre salaries with bribes. Petty corruption is still a serious problem in many of the CEECs. [Central and Eastern European Countries] (Grabbe, 2004, p.76) \*

Decentralization was a common feature of administrative change in eastern Europe. All were agreed that one of the faults of the previous system had been excessive centralization. A number of different things can be meant by this – the establishment of a new private sector taking some responsibilities from the state, greater autonomy for individual ministries, the establishment of quasi-autonomous governmental bodies (for example in order to delegate areas of decision-taking to 'social partners'), or greater managerial autonomy for state enterprises and institutions such as schools.

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\* The difficulty of making progress when officials are nervous of their positions, expecting some form of 'incentive', resentful of others, or uncertain of their political direction is something I can personally attest to. However this kind of behaviour is not unknown in western Europe too!

It was not always clear just what the many advocates of 'decentralization', both at home and abroad, were actually commending.

Nevertheless, what did undoubtedly happen was a greater emphasis on local government, and the establishment of elections at this level. The structure of local administrative units was not always new, but the idea that they were appointed independently of central government or the Party was. This tier of government was allocated new responsibilities – usually including at least some education functions and often also responsibility for employment offices.

Local government was not always ready to discharge these new responsibilities and there could be confusion about just what decisions had been devolved and – in particular – about responsibility for funding:

...the transfer of expenditure authority to local governments was often not matched by adequate local resources and led to gaps or lapses in service delivery. In many cases, local governments lacked the mandate or capacity to raise revenues through taxation. Even where local governments did have authority to tax, high levels of informal sector activity and tax avoidance limited actual revenues. (Ringold, 2005, p.42)

Whether, in the case of education, decentralization was a necessary precursor to a healthier and more relevant system or an "ideologically motivated" distraction (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005, p.207) is a matter of some dispute. Sandi in Romania considered at the time that the system was just not ready for local democratic involvement:

... it is not possible to bring about the decentralisation of education and more democratic management procedures based on the participation of local people, since those principles are not working at the level of local administration. (1992, p.90)

The result was that in many countries the national ministries of education retained a good deal of detailed control, with responsibility for the efficient operation of the system remaining unclear:

Ministries of Education ... are responsible for curricula; recruitment, evaluation, training and promotion of school principals and teachers; and for the establishment of norms governing minimum and maximum class size and teaching hours. These constraints make it impossible for local governments to carry out actions to improve efficiency ... unless the Ministry of Education agrees. (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005, p.231)

## **Labour markets**

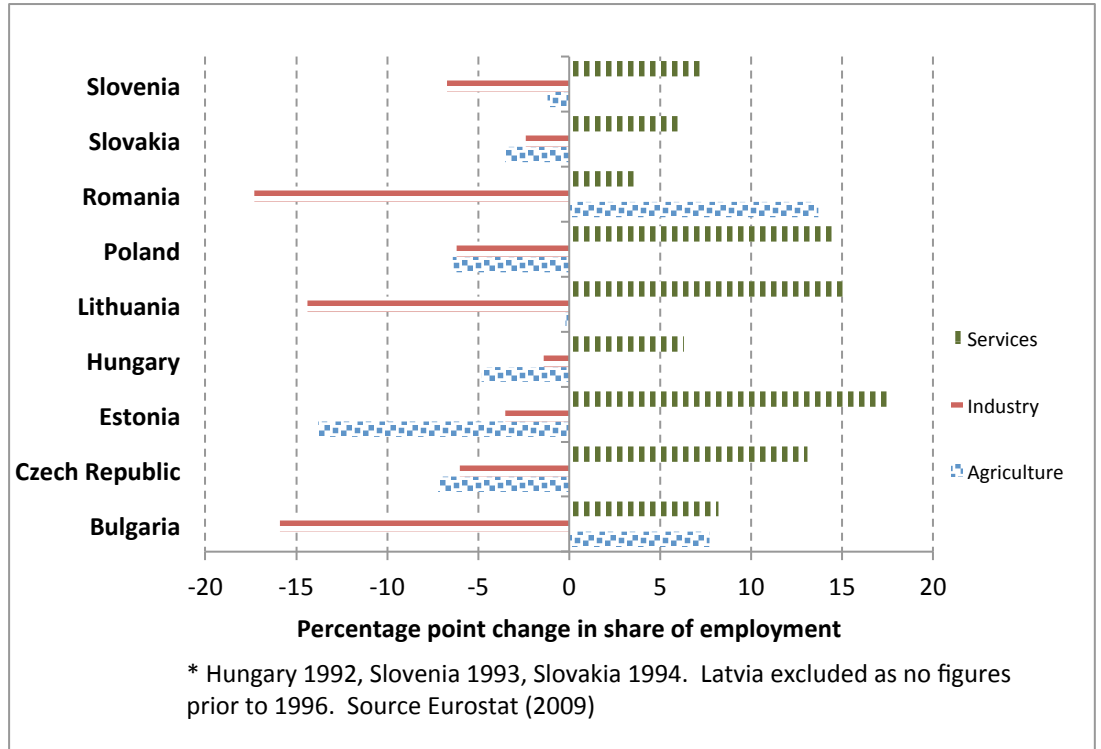
In the transition period the labour market saw a massive reallocation of labour from sectors favoured by the central planners of the communist era to new areas favoured by domestic consumers and foreign markets. Such a reallocation was wholly predictable, and – for most – a desirable phenomenon. But it was the new market mechanisms that needed to be established, and the frictions that arose in the process, which gave rise to the problems on the labour market that occurred in the 1990s. The fall in output that we have noted and the imposition of defined budgets on the large state enterprises gave rise to an immediate loss of jobs. The question was how fast, and on what terms, this labour would be reallocated to the new sectors.

The ensuing changes pulled in different directions. In many countries comparatively generous redundancy and early retirement terms were granted to surplus workers in the state enterprises resulting, especially for older workers, in their withdrawal from the labour market entirely (Boeri, 2000). However workers taken on in the new sectors or retained in newly competitive industries were very much more productive than before; according to Rashid, Rutkowski and Fretwell, (2005, p.61) “... economic transition ... was associated with a strong employment-productivity trade-off that has been unambiguously resolved in favour of productivity.” This meant that fewer workers were needed, but that – for those who worked – real wages rose.

The result was rapidly growing inequality. According to Havrylyshyn and Nsouli (2001) inequality as measured through the *Gini* co-efficient rose at twice the pace that it had done in the UK and the USA during the 1980s. Of course this was from a base of considerable equality of income under communism, so by around 2000 inequality was roughly on a par with the EU15 (Noelke, 2008). However, given the previous comparatively low levels of wealth and consumption in some of the countries, this meant that the new ‘relative’ poor had very low absolute levels of income; Noelke gives figures (p.74) showing that in 2002-3 between a quarter and a third of the populations of Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania lived below the World Bank’s ‘vulnerability’ threshold of poverty (\$4.30 a day), with over half the population in the case of Bulgaria.

There were dramatic sectoral shifts. Figure 1 shows the very significant declines in the previously dominant industrial sector with large increases in the service sector, usually from a low base.

**Figure 1: Change in Sectoral Mix 1990\* -2000**



We may note the substantial increase in agricultural employment in Romania and Bulgaria. This was an odd feature of transition since in most cases of economic modernization there is a move away from the land rather than towards it. According to Gebel (p 42) however, "...agricultural employment was a source of secondary income and an employment opportunity of last resort for many laid-off workers and pensioners"; in some countries redundant workers made their way back to their families' newly recovered small holding and engaged with what was often close to subsistence farming.

There were other ways in which labour markets responded to the fall in output and increase in productivity that exposure to open markets brought about. There was a fall in the previously high activity rates (propensity of people of working age to hold employment or actively seek work). Figures from the International Labour Organization show that for the eastern European countries male activity rates fell by nine percentage points in the period 1990-2006 while female rates dropped by eight points (2008, p.44).

In the case of females this was quite against the wider EU trend, since rates amongst the established member states (EU15) rose during the same period. In all the eastern countries female activity rates had originally been higher, and in some cases up to 20 percentage points higher, than in the EU15; however by 2006 they were lower than the EU15 in all cases except for Estonia, Slovenia and Lithuania. In Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania they were barely over 50 percent compared with an average for the EU15 of nearly 65 per cent. Furthermore, even before accession, emigration of workers to other EU countries was also a response to the lack of jobs at home.

The final symptom of labour market disruption was, of course, unemployment. This had been practically unknown during communist times, and there was little infrastructure to deal with it in terms of labour exchanges or unemployment benefits (Noelke, 2008). So even recording it was a problem during the early transition years. Table 2 gives unemployment averages for the five years from 1998, when the *Labour Force Survey* began to give reliable and comparable rates. As can be seen, total unemployment varied considerably over this period. High rates were entrenched in Bulgaria, the Baltic states, Poland and Slovakia, but in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia unemployment was below the level in the EU15.

**Table 2: Unemployment Rates 1998-2002 average\***

	Total %	Aged less than 25 years%	Ratio youth/total unemployment
EU15	8.1	15.6	1.94
Bulgaria	18.0	36.5	2.02
Czech Republic	7.8	16.5	2.12
Estonia	11.2	20.4	1.82
Latvia	13.4	23.3	1.74
Lithuania	14.7	27.2	1.85
Hungary	6.6	12.8	1.93
Poland	15.6	33.9	2.18
Romania	7.5	20.6	2.76
Slovenia	6.8	17.2	2.54
Slovakia	17.2	34.5	2.01

\*Bulgaria 2000-2002



The incidence of youth unemployment, on the other hand, was higher than the EU15 everywhere except for Hungary, with exceptionally high levels in Bulgaria, the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Young people in most cases were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as workers generally – something not unfamiliar to many established member states, but a source of great concern in the East, where this syndrome had been entirely unknown.

### **Transition in education**

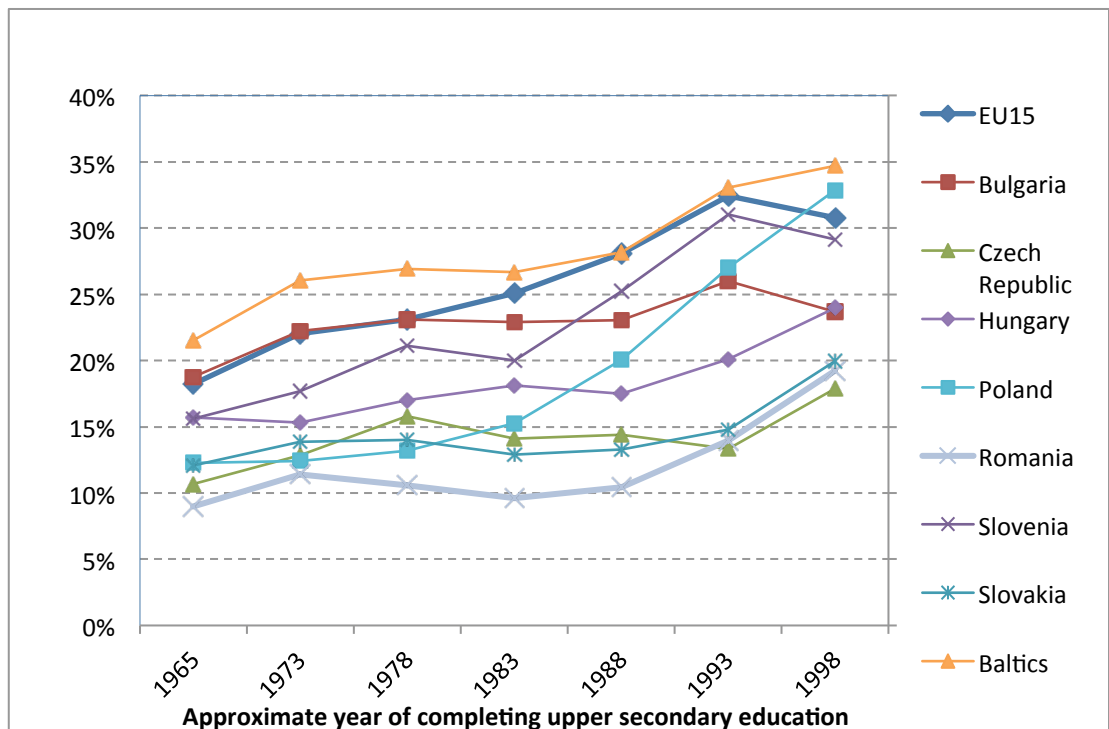
We saw in Chapter Three that there were early changes in education, but mostly of a limited nature: alterations to the general curriculum to expunge elements connected with communist ideology; the dropping of Russian for western European languages; some limited re-introduction of selective six to eight-year *Gimnasia* to include the lower secondary phase; and a loosening of restrictions on private and confessional education.

However, in terms of social effects the most dramatic early educational change came in higher education. In contrast to the position of upper secondary education where participation under communism had been high in comparison with western Europe, mass higher education had not been encouraged, but rather restricted to elites and to the known needs of the economy (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005). In all countries higher education began to expand after 1989, revealing considerable pent up demand as illustrated in Figure 2.\*

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\* Due to difficulties in establishing figures on participation in various stages of education which are comparable both over time and between countries, Figure 2 and Figure 3 use the highest levels of schooling reported by various age groups in the 2007 Labour Force Survey. These age groups are then assigned the approximate year when they would typically have completed secondary education. Thus those who in 2007 were aged 55-64 had a median age of 60 which would have equated to 18 in 1965, which is one of the points shown in the figures.

**Figure 2: Population of different generations having tertiary education**



Source: Eurostat (2009)

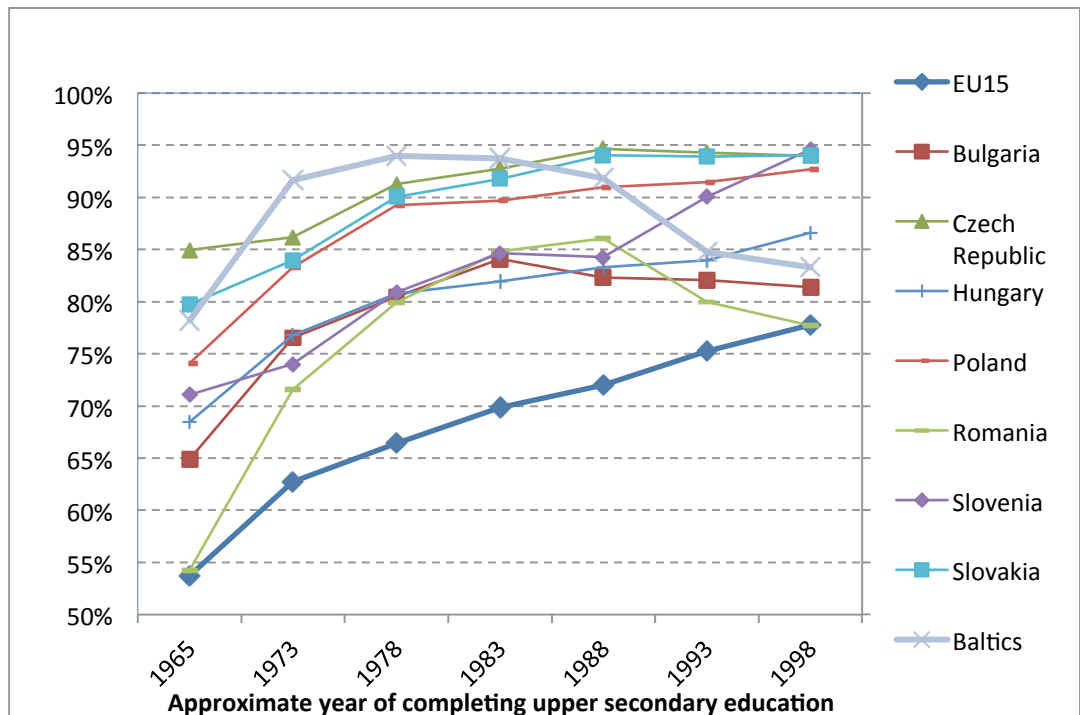
As well as expanding, higher education diversified. Not only did a significant private sector emerge in many countries, but also there was a growth of shorter vocationally-orientated courses within the tertiary sector (Kogan, 2008). Within higher education the previous preponderance of technologically-orientated courses reduced and service-orientated courses such as business and law saw the greatest increases.

Shortly after the beginning of transition the labour market began to reward those that held university-level qualifications with a considerable wage premium which Ringold (2005, p.47) reports as having doubled as early as 1993; indeed this was one of the main causes of the increased inequality we have noted. It is no surprise, therefore that the appetite for higher education continued to increase during the transition period, even though state-sponsored places were restricted for budgetary reasons, and despite concerns expressed by some commentators about the quality of often sparsely regulated new higher education institutions, for example in Romania:

As a result of the huge educational demand, private, fee-charging institutions have been organised, based on profit principles. Unfortunately, in most cases, their intention was not that of offering a better quality education, but of quickly earning large profits..." (Sandi, 1992, p.89)

Figure 3 shows the trajectory of high and improving upper secondary participation under communism through the 1970s and 1980s, with levels considerably higher than the EU15 at that time. Transition, however, seems at least to have halted the rise in many countries (with the notable exception of Slovenia). Indeed, the Baltic states, Romania and Bulgaria saw some decline during the transition years.

**Figure 3: Population of different generations having upper secondary education or more**



Source: Eurostat (2009)

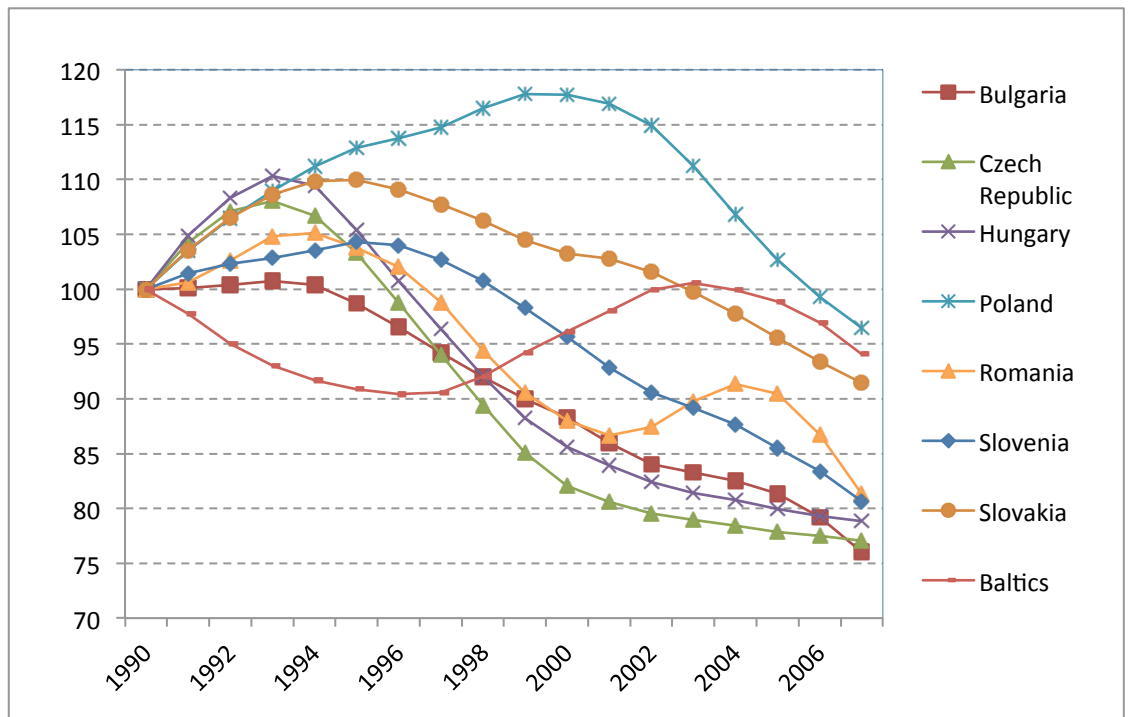
Despite the high participation rates under communism, there seems to be some doubt about the quality of school education inherited from the socialist era. Mertaugh and Hanshek (2005) detail scores from PISA 2000 which are generally lower than the OECD average and comment that these instruments test problem-solving (rather than memorized or mechanical learning) more than previous tests in which the ex-communist countries fared comparatively well. Boeri reminds us that in some respects the previous upper secondary education was fairly meagre:

The fact of having a relatively high number of workers with educational attainments above elementary schooling was mainly a by-product of the presence in these countries of 'lower vocational' schools offering generally one or two years of training in narrowly defined occupations up to the completion of compulsory schooling ...(2000, p.57)

When one adds the considerations that, during transition, budgetary problems meant that teachers' salaries were in many cases frozen, and the fabric of school buildings and equipment was allowed to deteriorate (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005), then questions about the underlying quality of education, let alone its appropriateness for the new circumstances, started coming to the fore.

A further feature of transition with considerable implications for education was the fall in school-age population in some countries. Figure 4 shows the trends in the population aged 15-20. Though some countries experienced an increase in the early years of transition, and Poland had a large and sustained increase through the 1990s, all countries had experienced some decline by 2007 and Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic had some 20-25 per cent fewer young people than in 1990. This raised problems of viability for specialized options within many vocational schools, especially in the rural areas where these declines were most dramatic and numbers of students were in any case low.

**Figure 4: Population of upper secondary age (15-20) - 1990=100**



Source: Eurostat (2009)

## Vocational education and training

From the discussion so far, we can readily discern some of the transition pressures that began to affect VET, even it had been a source of pride during the communist era which invested considerably in bringing technological know-how to the masses and which set great store by a disciplined work-ethic.

First, there was something of a threat to initial VET (IVET) in competition with general education. Both because general upper secondary education had been suppressed in communist times and because upper secondary general education was the 'royal road' to the desirable and expanding university sector, there was now a tendency for general education to grow at the expense of vocational programmes.

Though it is difficult to compare the figures from country to country, Table 3 shows reported changes in the proportion of upper secondary and equivalent education (ISCED 3) devoted to vocational, as opposed to general, education in 1993 and 2007. Both Latvia and Poland saw a dramatic drop in the proportion of students taking vocational options (in the case of Poland this took place largely after 2001), and Lithuania and Slovenia saw substantial reductions too. In other cases the reductions, though present, are relatively modest.

**Table 3: Students at ISCED Level 3 Vocational as Proportion of all Students at ISCED 3**

%	1993	2007	Change
Bulgaria	59	53	- 6
Czech Republic	82	75	-7
Estonia	28	31	-3
Lithuania	39	26	-12
Latvia	60	34	-26
Poland	71	44	-27
Romania	69	65	-4
Slovenia	78	65	-13
Slovakia	81	73	-8

Sources: Eurostat (2009), and ETF, 1999. Figures for Hungary have been excluded as they are clearly not comparable over the time period. For Poland the figures in the first column refer to 1994.

However there were also marked shifts *within* initial vocational education. As well as, or instead of, a growing preference for general education tracks, there was in many countries a shift towards vocational options which involved 'double qualifications' – a professional qualification coupled with the *Matura* (full secondary-school qualification) or equivalent which gave access to higher education. This shift was aided by the technical schools which we noted earlier had developed as a feature of communist education. Courses in these schools were longer in duration and broader in curriculum than the more strictly vocational options, and lent themselves to meshing in with higher education where they did not do so already:

Technical education attracts more students, but has also become more general while 'vocational' education is shrinking and has a low status. In all countries the share of VET courses leading to achievement of higher level certificates is growing, and the courses with broader profiles are preferred. (Nielsen, 2004, p.43)

In many countries these technical schools were considered to be on an "equal footing with general secondary schools" (Kogan, 2008, p.18), and in ordinary parlance were sometimes not referred to as vocational at all.

As well as encountering competition from general education and appearing as a dead end in comparison with the technical route, traditional initial vocational education also suffered other problems caused by the transition process.

The first, evidently, was a growing mismatch between the sectors in which programmes were offered, and the restructured economy. Even if it had been apparent what the new industries were to be, it was not easy to undertake the considerable re-equipment and re-training or replacement of staff which would be needed to achieve a better match. The fact that so many young people seemed to be unemployed, whatever vocational option they had taken, was demoralizing for any who wanted to bring about a significant shift in the sectoral mix within vocational schools.

Moreover with the demise of the large state enterprises, the links between employer and vocational school had very frequently been broken:

In the beginning of the privatisation and restructuring processes ...employers largely withdrew from the provision of training opportunities as they were not able to maintain the

training infrastructure or afford the financing of apprentices.\* This led to general disarray in the education and training system, and the dismantling of well-established links between schools and enterprises. (Kogan, 2008, p.21)

So there was a challenge for the lower-level vocational schools not only to find jobs for their students after they left, but also to provide them with anything approaching up-to-date and realistic work practice while on their programmes.

As a result of these difficulties, commentators began to refer to initial vocational education as out-dated and as a reason for the high levels of youth unemployment that we have noted:

... many young people are confronted with a lack of demand for their newly gained professional education as a consequence of unsatisfactory reforms to the national education systems, which lag considerably behind labour market needs and lead to skill mismatches and employers' complaints of low quality of education. (Cazes and Nesprova, 2003, p.11)

Boeri (2000) put together a raft of evidence, including declining job chances and low wage premiums for vocational students, coupled with the new-found enthusiasm amongst the public for general education, to reach a verdict which challenged the entire structure of initial VET:

The best indicator of the fact that the previous system had over-invested in [vocational] ... training comes ... from the changes which occurred in enrolment rates at secondary education institutes... Just as human capital theory would have predicted there has been a veritable boom of enrolments for general secondary and a strong decline of inflows into vocational education. (p.61)

This challenge was reinforced by a World Bank study (2006) which argued against any specific vocational training during secondary education. On the other hand, while not denying the problem of 'mismatch' and inappropriateness of much vocational education, Gebel (2008) points out that youth unemployment might be a symptom of a wider insider/outsider problem in the labour market, with established workers being retained in

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\* The use of 'apprentices' here refers to the fact that under communism students spent considerable time doing practical work in large enterprises, rather than to any system of apprenticeship contracts with different employers. In most central and eastern countries the previous system was more akin to French 'alternance' than to German apprenticeship.

jobs due to the high costs of making them redundant and employers preferring people with work records, while young people were left waiting in a queue for jobs regardless of any vocational training they had had.

Careers information and guidance services, barely needed under communism, began to emerge, but they were sparse and focussed on a psychological model of counselling rather than on the provision of information and fostering of self-help which had become the preferred model in much of the West (Sultana, 2007).

If IVET was in difficulty, continuing vocational education and training for adults (CVET) was simply at a very low level in most countries. Though in socialist times enterprises had been responsible for training their workers, the slowness of technological change and the stability of product markets had meant that there was actually little need for workers to adapt their skills (Boeri, 2000). The system of adult education or 'people's/workers universities' (see page 50 above) seems to have fallen into disrepute towards the end of the communist era:

... upgrading in the wage system was made dependent on achieving higher formal levels of education and training and/or the achievement of particular certificates. Participating in adult education became almost entirely focused on achieving (or buying) certificates rather than on improving knowledge and skills. (Nielsen, 2004, p.44)

Little trace of the former adult education system seems to have survived the transition, and in-firm training, inasmuch as it existed, disappeared with the firms themselves. While in some countries the new or re-structured firms had managed to (re)establish training by the time of Eurostat's 1999 Continuing Vocational Training Survey, in most of the region in-firm training was still at very low levels, as shown in Table 4.



**Table 4: Proportion of firms undertaking any type of training: 1999 %**

Czech Republic	69
Estonia	63
Latvia	63
Slovenia	48
Lithuania	43
Poland	39
Hungary	37
Bulgaria	28
Romania	11
EU 15	62

Source: Eurostat (2009)

Four years later, at the time of the Labour Force Survey's special 'ad-hoc module' on lifelong learning, adults in most eastern European countries were still experiencing far lower levels of adult learning than their counterparts in the West:

**Table 5: Adults 25-64 reporting any learning activities, 2003 %**

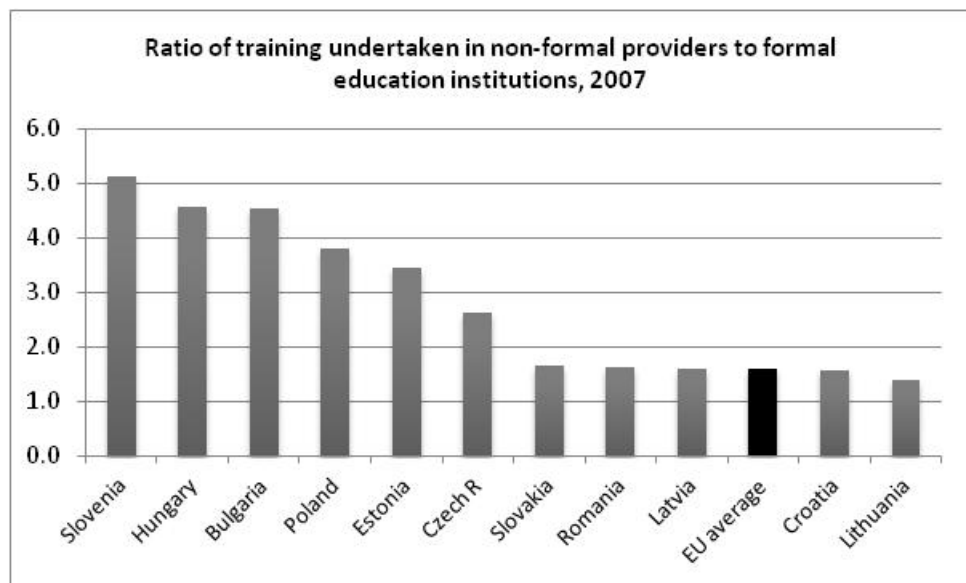
Slovenia	82.1
Slovakia	59.5
Latvia	46.2
Estonia	31.4
Poland	30.0
Czech Republic	28.7
Lithuania	27.8
Bulgaria	16.1
Hungary	11.7
Romania	10.0
EU 15	43.9

Source: Eurostat (2009)

Increased levels of unemployment in a number of countries raised the question of re-training; something which the communist era had not had to deal with at all. There was little or no infrastructure for providing this in terms of counselling, financing, training institutions dedicated to adults, or recognized programmes beyond the traditional vocational school courses which were theoretically open to, but hardly suitable for, displaced adults.

During the 1990s a considerable array of re-training courses grew up in response to this problem, but in the main they were not organized on a national basis. In some cases vocational schools offered accelerated (but still quite lengthy) versions of the traditional programmes designed for young people, but more frequently the vacuum was filled by private and voluntary sector providers, financed on by fees or through donor aid programmes, forming a loose sector which was “highly fragmented” and including “institutions of highly variable quality” (ETF, 2003, p.124). Figure 5 shows the ratio of adult education and training taken through non- formal education providers compared with formal institutions. It is apparent that in eastern Europe (with the exception of two countries) this non-formal sector became more important than is typically the case in the rest of the EU, in many cases very much more important.

**Figure 5: Adult Training Providers**



Source: Eurostat (2011)

This was quite a remarkable outcome in these countries where this sector, let alone private operators within it, was previously unknown. Consolidating, financing and even recognizing this new sector would present a considerable challenge, as would defining its relationship with the traditional system of vocational education and vocational qualifications.

Finally we should note that high and persistent levels of unemployment in a number of countries gave rise to the introduction of ‘active’ labour market

policies\* often heavily influenced by western models. Training featured as a possible route alongside alternatives such as intensive job-search and temporarily subsidized employment. These training options frequently made use of organizations in the new adult training sector, as well as the conventional vocational schools, but, as they were often financed through the insurance funds which also had to pay the much increased burden of 'passive' unemployment benefits, they were often crowded out in terms of resourcing (Rashid, Rutkowski and Fretwell, 2005).

### **An agenda for VET reform**

By the end of the 1990s a distinct agenda was building up for improvement and change in VET. Lower level IVET had come under considerable challenge, not only by commentators, researchers and international bodies, but also by local students and parents. It needed to modernize in a number of different ways: its match with the new sectoral make-up of the labour market, its breadth in terms of the 'flexibility' of occupational profiles, its progression routes within the education system – particularly to higher education – its quality in terms of teachers and equipment, and its links with firms. On all these fronts it was now perceived as being weak. And because of the traditional assumption that VET was an important contributor to economic success, weaknesses in vocational education were seen as a cause of economic and employment problems, rather than being a result of them.

On the other hand, the communist strand of technological education seemed to be showing that it had a useful part to play in bridging the differences between old (technical) and new (flexible) skills, as well as providing a route to higher education which did not rely on classical notions of the *Gimnasium* or *Lycée*. However whether it could prove both popular with the public and valued by the new employers remained to be seen.

In many countries the whole field, and indeed culture, of continuing vocational training was to a large extent absent. With the new emphasis on lifelong learning beginning to emanate from the EU and the patent problem

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\* See Glossary.

of thousands of workers displaced from the old failed industries, the eastern European countries plainly had a lot to do on this front.

At the same time as they were beginning to perceive that a new approach to VET was needed, the countries were also experiencing the legacy problems of a large and physically deteriorating estate of VET schools. Equipment, where it was not wholly inappropriate, was decaying. The cadre of teachers in vocational schools was increasingly poorly paid and reflected the trades of the past rather than those of the future. And, needless to say, even if the direction of reform had been clear, the restrictions on public financing made it most unlikely that resources could be found to renovate the existing VET structure, let alone to explore new avenues.

Could answers (and indeed resources) be found abroad? There was a sense, after all, that the problems of the eastern European systems, though more intense, were not wholly unlike those that, as we saw in the last chapter, were beginning to preoccupy the West and which the EU had itself had begun to address in the 1990s – youth unemployment, lifelong learning and the need for increased competitiveness – all of which posed challenges to traditional VET systems in the West. And some responses by national education and training systems – expanding higher education, growing and highly diversified adult training sectors, and the advent of active labour market measures – which we have noted in the East, were also relatively new and converging trends amongst established member states (Green, Wolf and Leney, 1999). As the prospect of accession grew, therefore, interest on the part of the eastern countries in the EU as a possible source of answers to the region's VET problems grew also.

### **Interpretations of integration**

Though we have scarcely touched upon the EU in this chapter, it is worth noting what these events have to say about the process of EU integration. Plainly there were strong economic forces at work and – as we have seen – these carried implications for VET. It would be harder to claim that the economic forces pointed firmly towards convergence of VET in the East to EU norms. If there was an integrating effect it seems to have come about less directly; by virtue of their conversion to market-orientated economies

the eastern European countries were subjecting themselves to the same kinds of disciplines as the West, and therefore – inasmuch as economic conditions lead to a particular type of VET system – there was some convergence. This can perhaps be most clearly seen in the emergence of an adult training sector outside firms, responding to displacement of workers from declining industries. This sector had not existed before in the East, but was well developed in the West. Its arrival in the East was – at root – due to the East now being subject to the same processes of unplanned industrial change that was familiar in the West.

Some might point to the growth in private training organizations as evidence that ‘marketization’ had invaded a sector previously dominated by the public sector. However, the growth of this sector was not at the expense of the public sector vocational schools, which had never undertaken much short-course provision for adults, and indeed seemed reluctant to make offerings in this new area. Moreover many of the new providers in this sector were non-governmental organizations rather than ‘for-profit’ companies. Though some eastern countries did permit private sector schools, these did not establish much purchase outside the (expanding) higher education sector, and do not seem to have featured in the secondary vocational sector at all. In short, the private sector in education seems to have been very largely confined to ‘growth’ areas (adult training, higher education) where its advances seem to have been more to do with lack of interest on the part of the public sector institutions than with any inevitable tendency, let alone deliberate policy, towards privatization in the educational sphere.

It seems unlikely that the events described here would lead much credence to an inter-governmentalist interpretation, for the simple reason that in many countries for much of this period it was not plain that governments were capable of taking carefully considered decisions at all. They were new, with inexperienced politicians and officials, or distrusted and alienated members of the ‘old guard, and the events they were buffeted by were quite unfamiliar. Inter-governmentalism as a theory depends on there being governments to take well-balanced self-interested decisions. Such a description just does not fit the general position in the East at this time, let alone any particular decisions about VET.

Because the EU itself has not appeared in this chapter, there is no direct evidence which might support the neo-functionalist interpretation which maintains that integration results from an essentially internal dynamic. One might be tempted, too, to dismiss a social-constructivist interpretation, as the policymaking community of the eastern countries was unstable and had had little time to orient itself to the EU or – until the end of the period – to start to participate in EU activities. On the other hand, we have noted an appetite to find out about approaches taken in established market-orientated countries, and it would appear that the population of the eastern countries were beginning to make the same kind of educational choices as their counterparts in the West – aspiring to higher education and taking general education in the upper secondary phase. It may be fanciful to suppose that there was direct copying of tastes, rather than a reaction to converging social and economic realities, but there certainly was intense interest in the culture and practices of the western countries (Strietska-Illina, 2007b) and we must remember the increasing exposure of ordinary people through working abroad and renewed contact with relatives in the West.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MAKING AN APPOINTMENT: Enlargement and Accession

#### Introduction

Recalling the heady street scenes that took place in Berlin, Prague and Warsaw through the autumn of 1989, it is easy to imagine that the dark-suited Heads of Government\* who met in Strasbourg that December would do little else but talk of these. It is salutary to learn, then, that the press notice on their deliberations (European Council, 1989b) leads with the not insignificant matters of Economic and Monetary Union, the Social Charter and the Single Market, all of which were very much in the forefront of EU concerns at the time.

However the Summit did deal with the East. It is worth quoting at length from the "Declaration on Central and Eastern Europe" made by the Summit:

Expressing the feelings of the people of the whole Community, we are deeply gladdened by the changes taking place...

We seek the strengthening of the state of peace in Europe... in a context of dialogue and East-West cooperation. It also has to be placed in the perspective of European integration.

...The changes and transitions which are necessary must not take place to the detriment of the stability of Europe but rather must contribute to strengthening it.

The Community and its Member States are fully conscious of the common responsibility which devolves on them in this decisive phase in the history of Europe. They are prepared to develop... closer and more substantive relations based upon an intensification of political dialogue and increased cooperation in all areas...

At this time of profound and rapid change, the Community is and must remain a point of reference and influence. It remains the cornerstone of a new European architecture and, in its will to openness, a mooring for a future European equilibrium...

Construction of the Community must therefore go forward: the building of European union will permit the further development of a range of effective and harmonious relations with the other countries of Europe. (pp.14-15)

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\* Not all were dark-suited. François Mitterrand wore a pale blue suit and Margaret Thatcher a rich red one.

These sentiments are worth a close reading for they display a number of different, and sometimes conflicting, motivations which were to repeat themselves in one form or another in the story of enlargement over the next 15 years.

One can readily detect a sense that developments were both uncertain and might be out of the control of the West. Not only does the reference to the need for “stability” obviously point to the fear of turmoil in the East, but the Heads of Government seem to acknowledge that the “feelings of the people of the whole Community” represent expectations amongst their own various populations about developments in the East to which the EU leaders will need to respond in this “decisive phase in the history of Europe”.

There is an aspiration, too, for the Community as an institution to perform a pivotal role, remaining (or perhaps more accurately becoming) “a point of reference and influence”. The United States and NATO were of course also other potential ‘points of reference and influence’, together with associated institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and it was perfectly possible that individual member states would go their own ways in responding to events in the East in terms of trade agreements, diplomatic responses, investment and aid.

The last statement that “the construction of the Community must ...go forward” reflects a concern that the events in the East might get in the way of the European project. We have noted that the same Summit was also considering important internal matters. While welcome in many respects, the events in the East brought evident dangers to the consolidation of the existing Community with, for example, the prospect of German re-unification diverting attention in the EU’s major economy or, at the other end of the spectrum, those countries less keen on integration seeking a ‘wider’ rather than a ‘deeper’ Union. The statement should be read as a defence of integration already agreed, rather than as an ambition for a larger Union.

Finally, one can see in the text an uncertainty about identity. At various points the communiqué refers to the “Community”, to the ‘European union’, to “Europe”, to the “Member States” to “the other countries of Europe” and to “East-West cooperation”. While no doubt the drafters were careful in their use of these different phrases, it would not have been clear to readers



just what entities were being referred to in these appellations. The state of flux is virtually tangible. It would be some time before it was clear whether the eastern European countries were on course to join the Community, to be associated in a co-operative structure yet to be devised, to take part in a 'Europe' which was something different from the EU, or merely to participate in more constructive 'East-West cooperation'.

If there were the uncertainties on the part of the EU, then it hardly needs to be said that the eastern European countries were even less certain of the path they had set out upon. Were they merely throwing off the Soviet yoke, transforming themselves into market economies to take their place in the wider constellation of 'western-style' economies, joining (or as some put it, 'returning to') a historical 'Europe' which pre-dated the EU, or were they inevitably set on membership of an enlarged EU, in the same manner as other countries, notably Spain, Portugal and Greece, had recently done on their path from dictatorship to democracy?

The answers to these questions are clearer now, but over the 1990s they were less than self-evident. The story of that decade is the working out of what 'integration' and 'cooperation' would actually mean – both for East and West. This is not just a matter of tracking the formal decisions about enlargement and accession, but also of recognizing that the entity that the 'new member states' were joining was itself undergoing changes – the target was a moving one. And the goals of "Europeanization" (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005b) went wider than simply membership of the Union; there were presumptions about "European" ways of doing things which went beyond the formal requirements for membership, though they were not always clearly delineated from those requirements.

This chapter therefore:

- briefly charts the main milestones in decisions on, and conditions for, accession;
- focuses on the formal requirements and processes for membership inasmuch as they affected vocational education and training;
- charts the implications for eastern Europe of the new forms of 'co-operation' embodied in the 'open method of co-ordination' which became a feature of EU activity towards the end of the 1990s;

- reviews the resulting mix of means at the EU's disposal for influencing VET in the East.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on what the story of enlargement has to say about the various interpretations of the motive forces for EU integration.

### **The pathway to accession**

There is no mention of possible accession of the eastern countries in the 1989 Strasbourg communiqué. Though there was a clear understanding on the part of the West and NATO that momentous events had occurred which merited a significant response, it was far from clear at this point that accession to the EU would be part of that response. On the other hand it is evident that, even at this early stage, the Council wanted to emphasize the role of the EU (as distinct from its member states) in playing a key part in the unfolding developments. At the practical level it sought a co-ordinating role with respect to aid, emphasizing:

the key importance it attaches to the fact that aid and cooperation projects decided on by Western countries should be as complementary as possible ... [ensuring] that the efforts undertaken to facilitate the transition taking ... are coordinated and effective. (p.13)

Rather impressively when one bears in mind that it took place only weeks after the fall of Berlin Wall (and three weeks before the fall of Ceaușescu in Romania), the Summit decided on a series of positive responses over and above instituting an aid programme, including: confirming trade agreements with Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary, and decisions to participate in a “stabilization fund” for the latter two; setting up a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to “to assist the transition towards a more market-orientated economy and to speed up the necessary structural adjustments” (European Council, 1989b, p.13); and, in the field of education and training, “to allow nationals of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to take part in a number of educational and training programs similar to Community programs”, and for “the setting-up of a European vocational training foundation” (p.13).

However, before long the idea of accepting all or some of the countries as full members of the EU, rather than as ‘associates’ of some kind, began to

be actively considered. If this took place it would be the fifth round of Community enlargement, and – to an extent – the procedures had already been established. Indeed the fourth ('EFTA') round involving Austria, Finland, Sweden and (aborted) Norway was still under way in 1989 and did not complete until 1995. But this fifth round, also referred to as '10+2'<sup>\*</sup>, was different in both the number that needed to be handled, and the fact that their applications for accession came from a distinct, and reasonably common, political background. There was also the fact that most were very poor in comparison with the existing members. This feature, however, was not entirely novel; the earlier accession of Spain, Greece and (especially) Portugal had also highlighted issues of gross disparities of income.

Under the Maastricht Treaty "Any European State may apply to become a member of the Union..."(European Communities, 1992 - Article O). For many eastern European countries the idea of accession seemed an early and obvious step:

After gaining independence [sic] in 1989-1990 following the collapse of communism, most CEECs were soon openly expressing the hope that, as they established liberal democratic and market-based systems, and as East-West relations were transformed, the way would be eased for their accession to the EU. (Nugent, 2004b, p.34)

There was, however, not a sharp distinction in the minds of many in the East, between the idea of 'Europe' in general and the EU as a particular institution with rules of membership. The rallying cry of 'back to Europe' (Anweiler, 1992; Hințea, Șandor and Junjan, 2004) had a distinctly nostalgic and even romantic connotation:

For them entrance to the EU is also going back to the Europe of the very brief inter-war period, to a democratic and independent past... For CEECs, Europe is not so much a project, but rather a sweet memory, a reality once lost and now regained. (Strietska-Illina, 2007b, pp.52-3).

General declarations of intent for membership were common (Sedelmeier, 2005b), though in the early 1990s it was not at all clear whether applications would be seriously entertained, how they would be handled, or what the conditions would be.

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<sup>\*</sup> This refers to 10 ex-communist states: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria. The '2' were Malta and Cyprus.

Following the Dublin Council of 1990 the eastern countries were offered, and accepted, 'Europe Agreements' which entailed free trade in manufactures, political dialogue on foreign policy and technical and financial aid (Sedelmeier, 2005b). However these quickly became seen as a prevaricating device, and a central group of countries – Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia\* – meeting at Visegrad, Hungary in 1991 determined to act in consort both to reinforce what they saw as European values and to press for “full involvement in the European political and economic system”. (Visegrad Group, 1991).

The EU had not been prepared for numerous applications for accession. Staff were quickly drafted in to handle the aid and negotiations that would be involved whether or not actual enlargement happened. These officials in the External Affairs Directorate had a “particularly strong” notion of EU identity and from the start “formed a group of principled policy advocates” in favour of incorporating the eastern European countries (Sedelmeier, 2005a, p.9).

There were many questions to be answered in determining whether enlargement to the East should go ahead and on what terms. Amongst them:

- should there be any special conditions, beyond accepting the established body of EU law (the '*acquis communautaire*'), and would exceptions and/or transitional arrangements be allowed?
- at what pace should accession take place?
- should applications be undertaken in series, in parallel or in groups?
- what would be the implications for EU budgets of a large group of poor, and in many cases agricultural, nations joining the Union? Would those existing members who were net contributors need to pay more; would those who were net beneficiaries get less?
- what would be the implications for Community decision-making and institutions (such as the 'rotating' presidency, and veto rights) of nearly doubling the number of member states?

Needless to say existing member states took different views on these various issues, and on the basic question of whether the Eastern countries

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\* At that point in the 'velvet divorce' referred to as “The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic”.

should be admitted into the Community at all. Though none openly opposed the prospective incorporation, undoubtedly some would have preferred a slower path, and considered that their own, hard-won, sectoral interests might be threatened and should be especially protected.

Much has been written about the various interests and dynamics that led to a decision by the 15 in favour of enlargement. Many commentators agree that it was not obviously in the economic interests of most existing member states to proceed with enlargement, or at least not in their interests as they conceived them at the time (Cafruny and Ryner, 2009). However in geopolitical terms there were strong reasons for Germany to favour accession for Poland, for Sweden to favour the incorporation of the Baltic states, and for the UK to favour enlargement as an alternative to the 'deepening' of the existing EU which threatened to bring about the economic and political union which it feared. The French and other more cautious countries may have been concerned that without an EU lead, the Germans would have developed relations with the Eastern countries on their own (Sedelmeier, 2005b).

Leadership from the Commission was particularly important. The group of committed staff within the External Affairs Directorate, coupled with the determination of Leon Brittan who led it from 1995, overcame the caution of other Commission officials whose job it was to maintain previous sectoral agreements which would be threatened by the absorption of so many new members. According to Sedelmeier "The policy advocacy from inside the Commission was crucially important for policy to evolve, and for obtaining compromises on the many awkward questions that enlargement raised for the incumbents." (p.426)

There was also the power of ideas. Western Europe had contrasted itself with the eastern bloc since the 1950s, both in terms of ideals of democracy and in terms of the effectiveness of its economic model. After so much advocacy, was it viable for it now to turn previously communist countries away? Even the "... less enthusiastic states become swept up in a rhetorical commitment, which led to a 'rhetorical entrapment' involving a process of virtual drift towards a policy commitment they did not at heart support..." (Nugent, 2004a, p.6).

By 1993 the EU had determined to show a more purposeful response to the aspirations of the eastern countries. The price of not making a constructive response was by then being illustrated in the wars within the former Yugoslavia, where the EU was a hapless onlooker. At the Copenhagen European Council of June 1993 it was “agreed that the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union” (European Council, 1993, p.13). It went on to spell out, for the first time, the conditions of membership:

...that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;

the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.

...the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.”

These *Copenhagen Criteria* also specified that “the Union’s capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration” (p.13)

So, as well as complying with the inherited body of European law (the ‘*acquis*’), the aspiring members would need to show that they had made an enduring transition to democracy in the western sense; similarly that their economies had changed to a market basis and that their industries could compete with those in the West. Further than these, the countries should be on the path to economic and monetary union – a condition that did not apply at the time to some of the existing members. These economic criteria had implications for education and VET which went beyond the strict contents of the *acquis*; at the time – as we have seen in Chapter Four – the EU was separately evolving the doctrine that education and training was an essential component for future competitiveness and that EU institutions had a role in promoting it. Thus the combination of the inclusion of economic criteria at Copenhagen with the emerging emphasis on lifelong learning as a key economic factor would help establish a lively interest on the part of the Commission in the state of VET in eastern Europe.

Two years later, at the Madrid meeting of the European Council, a further condition was introduced. This was that the countries should not only accept the *acquis* and legislate in accordance with it, but that they should

demonstrably have the capacity and institutions to implement it. This gave the Commission, which was responsible for negotiating and monitoring the accession process, the licence to evaluate the internal administration of aspiring members.

During the course of 1995 and early 1996 all ten eastern countries formally applied for membership. At the same time the Commission was considering in detail how to handle the negotiating process and what the implications would be for “absorption”, including the future division of the structural funds (Nugent, 2004b). This resulted in a major piece of work, *Agenda 2000* (European Commission, 1997b), which formed the basis for the opening of negotiations in 1998.

By 2000 it was apparent that a ‘mass’ integration of eastern Europe might be possible. In June 2001 the Gothenburg summit confirmed May 2004 as the target date for the accession of the majority of countries (including Malta and Cyprus), and 2007 for Romania and Bulgaria. This timetable was adhered to, with referenda in the various countries confirming the matter.

Beyond the enlargement to ‘27’, certain countries in the western Balkans subsequently entered the application process. Following the completion of negotiations, and the necessary domestic referendum Croatia joined in July 2013, and Serbia is a recognized ‘candidate country’ along with FYR Macedonia and Montenegro (European Commission, 2013).

### **The accession process and requirements with respect to VET**

*Agenda 2000* was a major development. It considered the implications for Community policies in areas such as agriculture, employment and external affairs in the light of enlargement. It made an assessment of the challenges that each of the candidate countries would face in order to meet the *Copenhagen Criteria*. It recommended a format and style for negotiations. And it assessed the impact on EU budgets, recommending a new financing framework which took account of the demands of the likely new members.

The strategy for handling the accession negotiations was based on four principles (European Commission, 1997b, p.52):

- new members would take on the full rights and obligations of members on accession – there would be no ‘second-class’ or ‘transitional’ status;
- they would be expected to apply and enforce the *acquis* from the start of their membership – so domestic laws incorporating the *acquis* would need to be passed before accession;
- it would be possible to agree particular and time-limited ‘transition measures’ which fell short of the full rights and obligations of members on a case-by-case basis where these were justified;
- progress in adopting the *acquis* and in conforming with the other criteria would be regularly reported on by the Commission.

The *acquis* was a very substantial body of law amounting to 80,000 pages in all (Nugent, 2004b, p.47). To make matters manageable in negotiations it was divided into a series of 29 ‘Chapters’. Chapters were ‘opened’ for negotiation at certain points in the overall process and ‘closed’ when the Commission considered that a satisfactory outcome had been reached. Chapter 13 covered Social Policy and Employment and Chapter 18 concerned Education and Training. Their contents are outlined later.

As well as setting out the recommended process of negotiation, *Agenda 2000* contained an ‘impact assessment’ of eastern enlargement on existing Community policy areas. Certain passages are worth quoting, as they give a sense of the Commission’s agenda with respect to VET:

Important investment in human resources will be necessary and Community social policy and its funding will be burdened accordingly. Adaptation of acceding countries to the Community social *acquis* and the European Social Model could be adversely affected by the large number of citizens having a standard of living far below the EU average, by insufficiently developed vocational training networks, by systems of industrial relations still in transition and in need of improvement, and by inefficient public administrations... (p.99)

Here the Commission recognizes the risk that – unless the social infrastructure of the eastern countries is improved – there could be



something of a two-tier Europe, such that both the body of existing agreed practice (the *acquis*) and the 'European Social Model'\* could be threatened.

No substantial problems are expected from the participation of acceding countries in Community cultural, educational and training activities, but new members are likely to draw important amounts from Community programmes and structural funds. Sustained co-operation in the run-up period to accession will contribute to improve the viability and efficiency of these sectors in candidate countries in view of facilitating their integration into the European framework. (p.100)

The assessment here was that there would be no difficulty in the countries participating in the education programmes organized by the Commission – indeed as we have seen the participation of the eastern countries in these was called for as early as the Strasbourg Summit – but administrative capacity in operating these, and the much larger European Social Fund, were considered likely to be an issue.

A substantial West-East wage differential serves as a strong incentive to East-West migration despite high unemployment in Western Europe. On the one hand, this may accelerate the drive towards more flexible labour markets.... On the other hand, labour market imbalances might increase, as there will be little employment opportunities for those parts of the Western labour force which will be crowded out... The need to build up an adequate publicly and privately financed infrastructure, and to invest in human resources, ... will require substantial financial resources, which will only partly come from domestic savings. With respect to public infrastructure in particular, transfers from western countries, and especially from the Community, are of considerable importance. (p.107)

Here the Commission makes a case for the West to invest in infrastructure, and "human resources" in the East, in order to promote growth there and to avoid the large migration of unskilled labour which might threaten employment levels in the West.

Enlargement carries a risk that support for a broad social policy would become weaker in the Union as a whole, especially if adaptation of acceding countries to the *acquis* were inadequate. Further development of Community policies (equal opportunities for women, labour law, co-ordination of social security schemes) could be hampered... Achievement

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\* See Glossary. Essentially a balance between goals of collective welfare and competitive markets mediated through 'social dialogue' between organized employers and trade unions.

of the aims of recommendations for social protection could be retarded. (p.121)

Again there is concern that an underdeveloped East might act as a drag on the adoption of more progressive social policies in the West. This acknowledged the fears that existing members that new populations from the East would undercut them within the Single Market.

In general, education and in particular higher education, attains a relatively high level in the candidate countries, though prolonged budgetary constraints have had important negative effects. Vocational training and youth policies face important needs of modernisation and adaptation in order to be able to cope with the requirements of democratic market societies. (p.124)

Here we see that the Commission recognized the basic strengths of education in the East, but called for its “modernization”. In all, as well as an insistence on the *acquis* in the field of employment, a substantial injection of resources to adapt and reform VET would be necessary.

*Agenda 2000* went on to propose ‘Accession Partnerships’ whereby issues for attention identified in negotiations would be formulated in terms of “precise commitments on the part of each applicant country” which would be supported, where possible, by “mobilisation of all the resources available to the Community for preparing the applicant countries for accession” (Section IV.1). Thus the aid programme which had been instigated after the Strasbourg Summit would be specifically geared towards those issues arising from accession negotiations.

Finally *Agenda 2000* presented a brief assessment (European Commission, 1997a) of the preparedness of all ten eastern European applicants using the *Copenhagen Criteria*. Where matters relevant to VET were concerned each of the assessments noted that there were “no” or “no significant” difficulties foreseen in implementing the education and training components of the *acquis*. There were more concerns on those aspects of the *acquis* which concerned employment and social protection, though the majority of these were to do with health and safety, the codification of labour law and the presence of an independent labour inspectorate.

Under *Copenhagen’s* ‘economic’ criterion, to which VET might be relevant, there were far more frequent reservations. While by 1997 a number of countries were reported to be well on the road to market reform and able to

withstand the competitive pressures of the Single Market, the Commission considered that Bulgaria would “not be able to cope” with these pressures, and that Latvia, Lithuania and Romania would face “serious difficulties”. The main concern on this score was lack of restructuring of industry, but in this high-level analysis the Commission particularly pointed to “low levels...of skills among the workforce” in the case of Romania and “low productivity” in the case of Slovenia.

The extra criterion added at the Madrid summit concerning administrative capacity proved a substantial concern. Only Hungary and Poland scored well for efforts already made – all other countries needed “significant and sustained effort of reform” (the Czech Republic) or some minor variant of this formulation.

Nevertheless the Commission viewed the situation promising enough to recommend opening negotiations with a number of countries. The first round involving the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia started in March 1998. The opening of negotiations with the other countries was subject to conditions of progress on various fronts, but got started in early 2000 following a further summit in Helsinki. Nugent (2004b) takes the view that the supportive stance of Romania and Bulgaria during the Kosovo war was rewarded by the opening of negotiations with them, which might otherwise have been further delayed.

There is no doubt that the negotiations for accession were extremely high stakes for the countries concerned and very directive on the part of the EU, as Nugent (2004b) comments:

"Whether the ... process really merits the description of 'negotiations' is perhaps open to question. ... The fact is that the 'negotiating process' largely consisted of the applicant states trying to satisfy the EU that they had both incorporated the *acquis* into national law as required and had suitable administrative structures and arrangements in place to be able to fully apply the *acquis*." (pp.52-3)

The negotiations proceeded chapter by chapter and a huge number of issues were addressed. Here we need only focus on the two relevant chapters concerning employment and social policies (Chapter 13) and education and training (Chapter 18).

Chapter 13 was substantial, incorporating a large span of accumulated Treaty obligations and specific Directives on such matters as collective

redundancies, equal treatment of the sexes, health and safety, and social protection for unemployed and sick workers. Interestingly, and significantly, it not only included such specific requirements, but also required participation in the *Employment Strategy* which – as we have seen in Chapter Four – had started in 1997 using the ‘open method of co-ordination’:

The candidate countries shall work in co-operation with the EU on the follow up of the Employment Policy Review. The candidate countries are invited to address the following issues: (i) whether the functioning of the labour market is improving so as to ensure that labour supply can be effectively matched with demand for labour on the domestic market and what policy measures are being developed to support this process; (ii) whether policy reforms and labour market transformations are progressing sufficiently rapidly and deeply to permit a full participation in the Single Market; (iii) the policies and measures ... being pursued to prepare the large share of the working age population which is unskilled or inappropriately skilled for a market economy; (iv) the degree of readiness of the employment policy structures and the employment policy delivery systems to implement the Employment Strategy. (DG Enlargement, 2004, p.46)

A similar injunction concerned ‘social dialogue’:

The Treaty requires that social dialogue be promoted and gives additional powers to the social partners. The candidate countries are, therefore, invited to confirm that social dialogue is accorded the importance required and that the social partners are sufficiently developed in order to discharge their responsibilities at EU and national level, ... the development not only of tripartite structures but also of autonomous, representative bipartite social dialogue is an important aspect ... (p.46)

Arguably these stipulations went rather further than the obligations of existing member states, strictly interpreted.

This chapter also covered the institutional arrangements that would be needed to take part in the mechanisms of the European Social Fund, which of course involved the disbursement of monies for education and training.

Chapter 18, dealing with education and training, was far less burdensome. As the *Guide to Negotiations* noted “Education, training and youth is primarily the competence of the Member States” (DG Enlargement, 2004, p.60). There was only one relevant Directive (dealing with free education for the children of workers from other member states). The other requirement was that countries should be in a position to participate in the

education and training programmes run by the Commission. Given that they were already doing this (as a feature of the earlier 'Europe Agreements'), there were few problems.

Given the unproblematic nature of Chapter 18, it is not surprising that negotiations were marked as 'provisionally closed' a few months after they were formally opened (by October 1998 in the case of the first batch of applicants, and by May 2000 for the second batch). Chapter 13, though, took longer, with negotiations typically lasting a year to eighteen months before 'provisional' closure, though less than six months in the cases of Romania and Slovakia (DG Enlargement, 2004, p.48).

Formal agreement was one thing; the Commission however continued to monitor compliance through a series of annual progress reports on each country. These will be analyzed in detail in Chapter Eight.

### **The 'open method' is applied**

Chapter Four noted the development of the 'open method of coordination'. This was first used in the European Employment Strategy (EES), which started in 1997. Here the process is described as being :

based on the key principles of subsidiarity (balance between European Union level and the Member States), convergence (concerted action), mutual learning (exchanging of good practice), integrated approach (structural reforms also extend to social, educational, tax, enterprise and regional policies) and management by objectives. Concerning this last principle, the strategy uses quantified measurements, targets and benchmarks, to allow for a proper monitoring and evaluation of progress. (European Commission, 2006a, p.3)

From the start the "adaptability of individuals" was one of the policy dimensions of the "highly choreographed and stylized" EES (Dinan, 2005, p.460). This gave scope for the 'open method' to evaluate education and training, to prompt states to make commitments for targets in the field of VET, and to subject progress against those targets to scrutiny.

As we have seen, the candidate countries were effectively required to participate in this 'voluntary' process. Keep considers that in general the process was weak:

The problem is that the EU ... can only engage in weak forms of co-ordination in the area of education, training and LLL

[lifelong learning ]. The [national action plans] provide a common reporting mechanism, not a real means of policy co-ordination. Individual states have their own goals, targets and visions of what LLL policies might deliver, and tend to prioritise these over the goals of the Commission. (Keep, 2006, pp.162-3)

However there is reason to believe that, in the case of the candidate countries, the process was considerably more powerful. As a result of their backgrounds, of course, the whole business of planning targets and reporting against them had a certain resonance which went wider than voluntary participation in a climate of “mutual learning.” Moreover, the EES process was clearly and explicitly bound up in the assessments that were being made of their preparedness for accession. Last, with a free and, in most cases vibrant, press operating in a climate where entry to the EU was at or near the top of the political agenda, the countries were very aware that their efforts in the ‘transparent’ EES process were going to be highly visible to their publics.

The mechanism for entry to the EES was the preparation of a *Joint Assessment Paper* (JAP) agreed with the Commission. This gave a diagnosis of what the employment situation was, what the reasons for any underperforming aspect were, and what should be done about it.

Though education and training had been a theme in the EES, after 2000 *Lisbon* gave them a space of their own with associated targets and monitoring mechanisms. As we saw in Chapter Four, an audit was carried out by the Commission in 2003 of progress on the lifelong learning front, following a large-scale consultation and the setting of ‘concrete objectives’ in this area in 2002. This audit was in two parts – the first dealing with the existing member states and the second, authored by the European Training Foundation (ETF), concerning the situation in the “Acceding and Candidate Countries” (DG Education and Culture, 2003).

The audit was based on reports from the individual countries, made in response to a Commission questionnaire. These were complemented by a series of ‘monographs’ undertaken by the ETF which assessed the situation in each country with respect to its Joint Assessment Paper under the EES; these are analyzed in depth in Chapter Eight. Though the ETF’s summary report contains a considerable number of examples of good practice and a few encouraging trends (including measures to tackle

marginalized groups, notably the Roma), many of its overall findings were rather glum:

... the situation has not changed radically in the acceding and candidate countries. A range of important initiatives has been taken in most of them, however... they have... been too recent or still ongoing so that no assessment is possible yet.

...the formal education system continues to receive priority with adult education as an important part of it, while little attention is paid to ways of acquiring job skills and informal forms of learning.

Coordination between ministries is still weak and no country has as yet an integrated policy covering LLL [lifelong learning]...The involvement of social partners in the definition and implementation of strategies for LLL is still poor.

...references to the Lisbon objectives as well as the EU benchmark in education and training are surprisingly absent in all country reports.

...there is little evidence of learning support in the workplace by means of incentives or other approaches, as well as to initiatives aimed at supporting private investment in training.

Finally, the quality of the VET system still needs very serious improvement... even if many ongoing initiatives are about to provide better equipment and infrastructure (pp.2-4)

The three great aspirations of European policymakers: an 'integrated' strategy, concrete plans with demonstrable progress, and full engagement of the 'social partners' still seemed a long way off as the first batch of countries went through the last stages before their accession in May 2004. It might, though, be argued that many of the same criticisms could be made of existing member states, if perhaps not to quite the same extent.

### **Means of influence**

Through the progressive crafting of the enlargement process the EU had developed a number of means of influencing VET in the East by the end of the 1990s.

First to emerge was financial support for the eastern countries which we have noted was agreed as early as the Strasbourg Summit at the end of 1989. We shall discuss this programme in detail in Chapter Nine.

There were also a number of measures designed to involve eastern European practitioners of VET in the networks of cooperation already established in the EU, and further ones which were set up for the

Community as a whole during the period that the enlargement process was taking place. We have seen that the eastern countries were invited to participate in the EU education and training programmes at an early stage, before there was any agreement on future membership. This meant that during the 1990s and up to accession many thousands of, students, teachers, managers of VET institutions and policymakers had the opportunity to visit VET establishments in EU member states and to receive visitors themselves. Ideas of what might be possible were generated through these exchanges, as well as joint working on projects and the 'study visit' component of many aid programmes. For the individuals concerned, some of whom occupied, or went on to occupy, influential positions within their own countries, such experiences were surely much more vivid in terms of influence than the weighty reports full of recommendations and injunctions which they received from official sources.

We also saw, in Chapter Four, that the eastern countries joined those from the EU to design new instruments of VET co-operation at the very start of the *Copenhagen* process in 2002. CEDEFOP, too, began to involve the eastern countries in its conferences and research programmes. Such measures were a way of exposing eastern VET to western practices, and given the natural curiosity of those who had been denied both travel and external information for many years, these encounters were a popular, if somewhat uncontrolled, means of dissemination of alternative approaches.

Then there was 'conditionality' – the setting of conditions without which EU membership would be slowed or, at the extreme, denied. We may distinguish, as many on the EU side did at the time, between 'hard' and 'soft' conditionality. Hard conditionality refers to the legal requirements in the *acquis* itself or in the *Copenhagen Criteria*. Soft conditionality (also known sometimes as the 'soft *acquis*') referred to the 'agreed' goals of the EES and *Lisbon* pursued through the open method of co-ordination. As we have seen, the 'hard' version was limited in the case of VET, because there were few legal requirements in the *acquis*. However the 'soft' version was an important feature, focussing on employment-related matters at first and then broadening after *Lisbon*. We shall look at its operation in Chapter Eight.



## **EU integration**

The enlargement process as a whole is a key test of EU integration theory. Liberal inter-governmentalists have some problems in accounting for it, since many established EU members looked likely to be losers as the poorer East began competing for EU budgets. This school therefore tends to play up the geo-political interests of ensuring stability and cementing ties of particular interest to particular countries (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2009). While it could be argued that the western governments found it convenient to pool the negotiations and aid effort through the central community organizations, there is little evidence of inter-governmental bargaining about VET policies, either between western governments to agree the line to be taken towards the East, or by the eastern governments in shaping the demands made of them.

Neo-functionalists have an easier task, pointing to a natural, geographical, 'spillover' involving more and more countries as momentum for EU membership built up through the region, a progressive incrementalism as the 'association agreements' led on to ever firmer plans for actual membership, and a leading role being played by EU institutions with the Commission taking a pro-active role (Niemann and Schmitter, 2009). It seems that the *Employment Strategy*, developed for the West, was transferred pretty well wholesale for application by the candidate countries, and quickly became an important feature in VET policy towards the East. The principles of the European Social Model, articulated in and after *Maastricht*, also became a touchstone for social and labour market policy in respect of the East.

The social constructivist case, too, seems plausible. The assent to enlargement, perhaps against their national interests, of a number of governments of established member states was achieved as a result of some kind of mutual solidarity, with the Commission cajoling them to hold to their oft-repeated beliefs in liberal, democratic and market-oriented 'European Values' (Risse, 2009). Conversely the candidate countries were, according to this school, as much motivated by the idea of coming 'back to Europe' culturally and politically, as by the prospect of immediate benefits in what they could see was likely to be a hard road to accession. The decision to open up the Community's VET and education programmes, which involved transnational mobility of teachers and students and cross-

border co-operation between education professionals, policymakers and professionals, was clearly motivated by an expectation that such joint exposure would positively influence both old and new members to the prospect of enlargement.

Those subscribing to the interpretations revolving around political economy, on the other hand, point to the interests of the West (in terms of large firms rather than governments perhaps) in prospective eastern locations for investment and new consumer markets. They cite the undoubtedly superior bargaining position of the established EU (representing those interests) over the impoverished East in dominating a one-sided 'negotiation'. This resulted in the East bearing most of the social costs of accession while being forced to conform to the Single Market and economic stability mechanisms which the forces of capital had established for the existing Community (Cafruny and Ryner, 2009).

It is true that the EU business community, as represented by the 'European Round Table of Industrialists' (ERT), was keen on enlargement. Part of their argument was that incorporation into the EU would allow access to relatively high skilled, but relatively low-paid, workers – though they considered these gaps would erode fairly speedily (European Round Table of Industrialists, 2001). It is also the case that the ERT considered that improvements could be made to the eastern workforce who they considered deficient in the areas of "sales, marketing, commercial management and finance", not always familiar with "up-to-date working methods" and with "problems amongst some workers, particularly in terms of their levels of personal initiative, creativity, commitment, and efficiency." (European Round Table of Industrialists, 1998, p.22). The ERT went on to:

request...all parties to work together and establish an "East-West Training and Skills Programme" designed to improve the range of skills and attitudes to work needed in the new, more competitive free-market economies of C&EE. These programmes should be coordinated on a public-private basis. (p.25).

However the ERT said no more about the nature of these programmes, nor do business interests seem to have taken any part in designing them or providing staff to become involved in them. ERT companies, of course, played a major part in training staff in the new ventures which they established in the East. And some ERT companies were involved in

establishing 'Business Enlargement Councils' where representatives of their new plants in the East could dialogue with eastern government departments. However, there seems little evidence that this kind of company-specific importation of VET practices is capable of influencing wider VET systems in host countries (Lauder, 2001).

While there is scant evidence of employers taking any detailed interest in the policies on VET being developed for the East, considerable care does seem to have been taken to preserve – and replicate – the 'balance' between market forces, corporatist traditions and social 'solidarity' represented in the European Social Model. There were fears that this could be upset by competition of cheap labour from the East, and a concern that the East should quickly learn the ways of 'social dialogue' practised widely in the West. This seems to accord with the 'varieties of capitalism' school which would predict a negotiated settlement about such matters within and between countries, though an alternative explanation is that this was simply exported from West to East without any real involvement of the 'social partners' in the candidate countries.

To take the analysis further we require a more detailed account of the treatment of VET in the accession process on the one hand, and in the support programme on the other. Chapter Eight is devoted to the former, and Chapter Nine to the latter. But first it will be worth reflecting on the ideas and concepts that were coalescing around VET in the context of transition and enlargement, for these ideas would surely inform the future trajectory of VET policy in the East.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IT'S ALL IN THE MIND: Concepts in Circulation

#### Introduction

At this point we pause for reflection. It is the late 1990s and we are witnessing the coming together of eastern European VET systems, formed under communism and buffeted by economic transition, with an EU VET policy which has evolved over many years and which has to be adapted for use in the process of enlargement to the East. It is not enough to record context and events. E H Carr spoke of :

"...the historian's need of imaginative understanding for the minds of the people with whom he is dealing, for the thought behind their acts... History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing." (2001, pp.18-19)

As discussed in Chapter Two (page 38) policies are influenced by ideas as well as what went before and by extraneous events. If we are to understand policies we must try to understand the ideas which influenced them.

To give a framework for this chapter we shall start with the most obvious sources of ideas which had a bearing VET in eastern Europe and which were prevalent in the 1990s. Following the pattern of chapters so far these are:

- from the perspective of the gradual development of EU policy on VET (Chapter Four), the notions of lifelong learning and of transparency;
- in reaction to the countries' communist past (Chapter Three), the notion of decentralization;
- in response to the pressures of transition and of accession (Chapters Five and Six), the notions of flexibility and Europeanization;

We first examine the provenance of each of these notions and then elaborate them in order to identify associated and subsidiary concepts with

a more direct reference to VET policy issues. A final section examines some tensions between these different strands.

It should be made clear that this chapter is – to an extent – speculative. We seek to distil the important new concepts which gained currency in the 1990s. Although it is fairly plain that the larger concepts were very much in use, the extension which this chapter makes to concepts in VET is not, at this stage, evidenced. Rather we shall use the template of constructs presented in this chapter as a framework for analysis of actual policy texts in Chapter Eight and see whether they were in the event important in an EU VET context, and what further VET concepts were in play.

### **Lifelong Learning**

In Chapter Four we saw how the European Commission had lighted on the idea of lifelong learning in the early 1990s. There were a number of strands to this. First it was an idea which was gaining currency, particularly in the circles of international organizations, notably the OECD (Martens et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 1997). Second, it usefully shifted the focus away from school-based education policies, which were clearly nationally sensitive and virtually off-limits for the Commission by virtue of the Treaty, to the less clearly delineated sphere of learning in general across the age-groups. Finally the framing of lifelong learning as part of an agenda focussed on economic competitiveness (rather than culture or identity) enabled it to be presented as both a legitimate area of activity for the Community, and also an important one in the light of the challenges for competitiveness which were considered to be faced by individual European countries and the EU as a trading bloc.

As we have seen, lifelong learning was a feature of the ‘Delors’ White Paper of the early 1990s and was reinforced in importance in the *Lisbon* developments in the years after 2000. It very much coincided, therefore, with the period of accession for the new member states.

If lifelong learning was a reasonably novel idea in the West, it was to a large degree an alien concept in the former socialist states. Though, as we saw in Chapter Three, there had been a reasonable level of adult education, first through literacy campaigns, and subsequently through institutions such as the ‘people’s universities’, these had not had an overtly

economic focus. And while state enterprises had trained their workers in the occasional new production technique, workers were not expected to exert initiative to upgrade themselves. The idea that individuals might need to constantly learn in order to make their way through a changing jobs market was an entirely inappropriate one in a communist system.

So the idea of lifelong learning was both a new and attractive one for the EU, and pretty much a blank canvas in the East. Associated with this economic version of lifelong learning were a number of related ideas with a particular application to VET:

- the responsibility of individuals and private enterprises for retraining, rather than reliance on citizens being moved inexorably through the structure of the state education system;
- the idea that training could be undertaken in different modes – with different types of provider, through work and life experience itself – and did not need to be confined to laid-down curricula, public institutions or recognized in official qualifications;
- that individuals possessed a quantum of ‘employability’ or ‘competence’, and could enhance this to their own, and society’s, advantage (Dale and Robertson, 2006);
- that government’s role in supporting lifelong learning was something very different from its traditional function of providing and regulating education and training opportunities. If learning could take place in many modes and was at individual’s initiative, government was much more in the business of promotion, facilitation and steering;
- the significance of a sector, largely unknown in the East, of adult training providers going well beyond initial VET qualifications offered on a part-time basis by established vocational schools.

### **Transparency**

We also saw in Chapter Four how the Commission had tried, unsuccessfully, to give expression to a common VET policy through the devices, first, of ‘harmonization’ (common content for VET programmes in different countries) and then of stating ‘equivalences’ (mechanisms to analyze the contents of one country’s VET programmes in such a way as

they could be directly related to those in other countries). The first was aborted in the 1960s and subsequently expressly prohibited by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. The second, as we saw, ran into the sands as it became clear that the 'correspondence tables' that CEDEFOP envisaged would be endlessly complicated and in practice impossible to update (see page 77 above).

The way forward eventually came with the example of the *Bologna* initiative in higher education. Here a basic architecture of a 'common higher educational space' allowed countries to map their qualifications in a way in which – though they were different – allowed other countries fairly readily to see certain key aspects, such as level and duration of programme and progression routes. Under the *Copenhagen Process*, starting in 2002, this technique was replicated in the VET arena, particularly through the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a common system of transcription (*Europass*), and proposals for a credit system for VET (ECVET).

In the jargon of EU policy circles this approach is referred to as 'transparency'. The theory is that if other countries, and the interested public more generally, can readily 'see' the nature of qualifications and programmes in other countries, they do not need an official calculus of correspondence but can make up their own minds – in an informed manner – as to whether or not to recognize training undertaken elsewhere with the EU.

The EU's promotion of transparency is by no means confined to VET or to education. The general approach is applied to matters such as food labelling, the courts system and border security, to give just a few examples. Transparency is held to contribute to 'mutual trust' (a phrase which recurs within the documents of the *Copenhagen Process*). It is also a necessary condition for the operation of the 'open method of co-ordination', which relies on a common understanding of different countries' progress towards the various economic and social targets.

From the point of view of the eastern European countries, the idea of transparency had an obvious resonance with the mood of reform following the communist era. That era was identified with secrecy and the hoarding of information within government. It was not the business of citizens to

make choices, and they did not need 'transparent' information to do so. By extension there were obvious attractions in the notion that the new era would provide the public with clarity, where previously there was obfuscation. Moreover, the association, in the field of VET, of transparency with the idea of travel, studying and working abroad (through devices such as mutual recognition through the EQF and *Europass*) constituted an added, and very practical, attraction.

Moreover with the structured, regulated and codified system which characterized education under communism, the basis of transparency was – on the face of it – in place. If internal training systems had been fragmented and informal it would have been very difficult to map them onto a common EU-wide architecture. However in the case of initial VET there was already a well-known formal structure, though, in the case of continuing VET, transparent organization would present more of a problem.

Associated with the central idea of transparency when applied to VET we can brigade a number of subsidiary concepts, including:

- formal qualifications and within them the idea of levels – again an accepted and important part of the communist system (Parížek, 1992);
- qualifications and programmes which are 'transparently' linked to occupational demand in the labour market – for example the methodology of deriving 'occupational standards' and basing vocational qualifications on these;
- learning outcomes as a unifying concept, divorcing the results of VET from the various syllabuses, durations of training and modes of education which differed between countries, and giving a 'transparent' account of what the goals of a course were;
- the availability of information about VET provision, gathered according to reasonably common classifications;
- quality assurance arrangements for VET which inspire the required degree of confidence and 'mutual trust' that qualifications truly represent their declared standards;
- governance of VET which is technocratic rather than political so as to preserve the integrity of the system and to inject stability over time. The added attraction, from the EU point of view, was that



permanent cadres of technocrats could relate to their counterparts in the central EU agencies, providing a channel of communication and consensus-building independent of the vagaries of national politicians. This technocratic emphasis had an especial attraction for officials in eastern Europe, giving them personal access to travel, status and legitimacy on an international stage, and possibly future job opportunities (Dimitrova and Steunenberg, 2004).

In a slightly different context, transparency was an important part of the accession process itself. As we saw in Chapter Six, a great deal of emphasis was placed on accession countries developing plans for different aspects of the accession agenda, and an important area for 'transparent' and public planning was employment policies, which included VET. Open planning can therefore be seen as an aspect of transparency, allowing the Commission to check progress and allowing domestic stakeholders to monitor, and contribute to, published plans for the development of VET. Planning, of course, was not a new concept for eastern European countries, though the practice of encouraging public consultations about, and scrutiny of, plans was entirely novel.

### **Decentralization**

We saw in Chapter Three that, except perhaps in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the communist era had been one of very considerable centralization, a feature which affected education as much as other facets of public life. It was a natural reaction, after the fall of communism, to undertake a programme of administrative decentralization, as described in Chapter Five. Despite transitional difficulties (page 92) the principle of decentralization was an attractive one, marking a clear distinction from the old politics of centralized Party rule.

At around the same time, decentralization of education responsibilities was also a discernible common trend in many western European countries (Green, Wolf and Leney, 1999). Furthermore, decentralization was attractive to the European Commission, as it offered a way to work around the sometimes obstructive stance taken by the national governments of established member states. We saw in Chapter Four how, in devising and operating the various educational programmes well before there was any

question of enlargement to the East, the Commission attempted – and to a large degree succeeded – in opening direct channels between itself and national education and labour market ‘players’. The operation of the structural funds also became more overtly regional during the 1980s.

The idea of decentralization, therefore, had attractions on all sides, though for rather different reasons. More problematic, though, was what was *meant* by ‘decentralization’. This was a multi-dimensional concept and, like ‘flexibility’, which we shall discuss in a moment, could be invoked as a justification for many different policies related to vocational education.

When applied to the administration of VET, it could simply mean a greater degree of discretion given to local as opposed to central government; local governments were in most cases nominally responsible for schools under the communist system (though subject to Party discipline which itself was highly centralized). Though arrangements differed between countries, a fairly common arrangement after 1989 was for local governments to be responsible for decisions about, and (at least partially) financing of, school premises, costs of utilities and major items of equipment, while central budgets covered teacher salaries. Decisions on the number of classes were also taken centrally, as these dictated the numbers of teachers to be employed in any given school, whose costs fell on the central authorities. Adjustments to this mix in favour of local governments, though not always accompanied by corresponding budgetary transfers, were made in the 1990s (Ringold, 2005).

These were the arrangements applying to initial VET. Continuing VET, however, was new and lacked any established administrative structure. Countries therefore had considerable freedom to decide how to organize this new sector.

On another interpretation, administrative decentralization could mean greater autonomy for schools, through giving greater managerial autonomy to school Directors or to governing bodies. This was the course taken in Czechoslovakia from the start, though it was not widely replicated across the region. Paralleling this type of decentralization came the question of framing school budgets, with arguments for and against formula-based methods such as were developing in some western European countries (cf.

UK, Denmark), and for vocational schools to be able to retain revenues raised by production activities and adult training.

In the same way it was not always clear whether the favouring of decentralization applied to the content of vocational education and, if so, to whom decentralized powers were to be given. As a rule the content of initial vocational education programmes was centrally developed and regulated, usually in considerable detail, including for example the numbers of lessons in different subjects which each 'profile'\* should contain, and schedules of equipment and materials that should be used. This pattern did not change greatly after the fall of communism. In this context decentralization could mean:

- power for schools to devise curricula or some portion of them;
- continued, but less detailed, central prescriptions linked perhaps to the move to learning outcomes noted earlier;
- delegation of central curriculum powers to professional groups and/or 'social partners';
- greater facility for schools to mount or terminate particular centrally devised vocational profiles without central authority.

Given these various possible interpretations we should not be surprised if the precept of decentralization were to be taken very differently in different places and at different times, and that the expectations of a number of actors were liable to be disappointed.

## **Flexibility**

Chapter Five charted the economic ructions connected with transition. Unemployment in general, and youth unemployment in particular, were a feature of all countries at some period of the 1990s. It was widely

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\* The concept of a 'profile' is a common one in eastern Europe. The vocational sphere in IVET is typically split into approved programmes, each leading to a particular occupation (or, less frequently, a limited range of occupations). Each of these profiles is then structured to contain a set number of years (usually 2-4), a stipulated mixture of general education, technical theory and practical work, and the former two are further stipulated in terms of individual subjects with a given number of lessons in each. Sometimes profiles are referred to as 'qualifications', but – though they invariably lead to the issue of a certificate relevant to the occupation(s) in question – they are more than the certificate, but rather the 'package' of programme, syllabus, required facilities and certificate.

observed, and eventually widely accepted, that the structure of industry – the size and location of firms, their ownership, the mix of goods and services they produced, and the occupations they employed – was to be permanently changed. But whereas it was fairly plain which industries were declining, it was not at all clear what the new sectors would be.

More clear was that the future structure of the economy would be fast-changing as, hopefully, domestic industry responded to changes in demand within and beyond Europe. The cessation of economic planning, the wider product markets available, plus the previously virtually unknown challenges of competition, would require a workforce which was flexible and in turn demand training arrangements which secured this flexibility (Barr, 2005).

‘Flexibility’ of the labour force was clearly to be at a premium. And it was not an attribute which was associated with the workforces of the previous communist regimes, despite their relatively high level of education. The need for flexibility of course stretched wider than VET, with ramifications for labour mobility, statistical classifications of occupations, and providing a rationale for the advent of national employment services which sprang up across the region to provide exchanges for labour and to help unemployed people adapt to the new labour market.

Within VET the idea of ‘flexibility’ often went hand in hand with the call for ‘modernization’ – an even vaguer term. The need for modernization had, of course, been urged by internal reformers before the fall of communism, notably in Gorbachev’s call for *perestroika* (restructuring) in the Soviet Union. Used together, as they often were, they represented the idea that the ‘traditional’ communist (and sometimes pre-communist) approach to VET was ‘rigid’ and not easily capable of responding to new circumstances. They also encapsulated the idea that a trained worker could not rely on a single trade to last a lifetime and would face uncertainties which could best be dealt with through access to re-training, itself provided in a responsive manner (Voicu, 2007).

But, like ‘decentralization’, flexibility could be interpreted in many different ways in a VET context:

- it might be taken as a call to review and rationalize the vocational profiles on offer (often numbering many hundreds), so that their content matched the new needs of industry;

- as a logical next step it might be interpreted as the need to institute machinery to ensure regular and frequent review of profiles in the future, so as to continue to keep pace with industrial change;
- alternatively it could be invoked to provide a rationale for fewer and broader vocational specializations which provide a foundation of relevant knowledge and skill to be supplemented by industry or higher education later on;
- linked with decentralization it might be taken as a call for schools to be able to devise or customize their own vocational profiles, in response to the needs of local employers;
- a specific instrument for curricular flexibility, widely promoted in the West, was modularization which would allow both the devising of different specializations according to student or employer choice, and allow the speedy revision of parts of a profile without requiring the restructuring of the whole syllabus;
- a further interpretation was the provision of general 'employability' skills which would be useful in a wide range of contexts, together with personal attributes such as learning to learn, to be fostered by student-centred learning techniques;
- yet further in this direction was a challenge to initial vocational education itself, arguing that the communist system had over-invested in this sector and that the modern world would value people who had extended general education rather than early specialization, a viewpoint – as we saw in Chapter Five – held by the World Bank;
- finally flexibility, interpreted as an individual virtue, had much to do with the concept of lifelong learning. Flexible workers would undertake learning throughout life and a modern VET system should be able both to respond to that and to encourage it.

There were, therefore, a number of possible different directions in which subscription to the general notion of flexibility could lead. By no means were they mutually exclusive, so – even on its own – the rallying cry of 'flexibility' could stimulate a large agenda for reform.

## **Europeanization**

The power of the idea of Europe was very obviously an attractive one. We have seen (page 115) that many in eastern European subscribed to the idea that their countries were, in some sense, going 'back to Europe'. And of course the EU was founded on an explicitly European idea, with the Commission specifically remitted to pursue it.

However there are, and were at the time, very different ideas of what the essence of 'Europe' is, and therefore of what a 'European' approach might consist of. At the simple geographic level Europe is a collection of countries situated within a region – in this context Europeanization has much to do with fostering interchange, whether of goods and services, of ideas or of people.

At the cultural level the notion of Europe is about attempting to identify and promote a certain shared culture and sets of values, often exemplified by reference to history and common heritage(s) of art, music, concepts of Christendom and conventions about the nature of government. Europeanization therefore refers to the progressive subscription to these values.

Again the idea of 'Europe' can be a simple shorthand for the European Union as a particular political entity, together with its constituent institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council and other agencies). Rather more generally it can refer to the 'Single Market' as a trading bloc and customs union (replacing the *Comecon*). Europeanization therefore means joining this club and applying its particular conventions.

In some contexts the connotation of 'European' has to do with an alternative to liberal free market ('Anglo-Saxon') philosophies. Europeanization therefore can be interpreted as adhering to the European Social Model of proceeding through negotiation between employer and worker interests and providing significant protection to those who are, or might be, affected by economic change.

With the possible exception of the last, all of these versions of the European idea were in currency in eastern European countries soon after the 1989 revolutions (and of course before the revolutions amongst certain groups). All of these, too, form part of the narrative of the EU itself, with

greater emphasis being put on some strands at different times and by different interests.

Applied to VET, we may detect a similar variety of impetuses by the idea of Europeanization. First we have noted some moves in the East to revert to 'European' patterns of schooling and VET, meaning those patterns which were prevalent before the pressures to mirror Soviet systems. These often replicated arrangements under the 'old' empires. The most obvious examples are those of the restitution of *Gimnasia* and occasional moves to divide lower secondary education into tracks in place of the 'basic schools' which predominated under communism.

Similarly there was an obvious rationale in moves to replicate western European VET models in the belief that these were bound to be both 'European' and appropriate for the new economic climate. Such moves could be both promoted and supported by bilateral links with the countries in question.

A more institutional interpretation would put at a premium the need to follow and actively participate in the developing VET policy of the EU itself. We noted in Chapter Four a series of initiatives taken by the EU in the late 1990s and early 2000s to create a 'European space' for VET. These initiatives were closely related to the idea of 'transparency' noted earlier. In particular there were attractions in participating in measures to foster cross-border collaboration in VET. This appealed greatly to the eastern European publics who saw the prospect of future job opportunities in other countries if their qualifications were to become transferable as a result of the EQF and the other EU instruments, and to students who wanted to study abroad or needed to accompany their parents to other EU countries.

Taking the interpretation of 'European' as connoting the European Social Model, there were clear implications for VET, for example the involvement of the social partners in the provision and governance of VET, and regulation of VET through licensed programmes linked to recognized occupations. This strategy appealed both as something of an evolution from the regulated and protected labour market under communism, and as a means of coping with the gross insecurity arising from economic transition (Rashid, Rutkowski and Fretwell, 2005).

However an alternative 'market based' model also appeared, to those who had experienced the communist system, to be one of the essences of being 'European'. In contradistinction to aspects of the European Social Model, this called for competition amongst more autonomous VET providers, choice for participants, relatively free markets in qualifications, and job security being reliant on the amount and quality of VET undertaken by an individual rather than the stipulations of the central authorities. In any case a growth in the informal economy, and of part-time workers, was forcing this kind of direction (Gebel, 2008), and the direction of EU lifelong learning policy also appeared to be envisaging this as the 'European' way (Stuart and Greenwood, 2006).

To summarize, therefore, the idea of 'Europeanization' might involve some or all of the following features in a VET context:

- promotion of 'typical' European forms of vocational education;
- active participation in EU initiatives relevant to VET;
- the fostering of interchanges with other EU countries;
- advocacy of the European Social Model of social dialogue and protective regulation;
- conversely, advocacy of competition in a VET 'market'.

### **Tensions**

Some of the concepts we have enumerated are mutually consistent or even reinforcing (for example lifelong learning and flexibility), but a few have problematic relations with each other. The codification of qualifications and the formalization of quality assurance, which are necessary for transparency, might inhibit the less formal types education and training which are stressed in calls for lifelong learning. Indeed a desire to square this circle might explain the stress placed by the EU on the 'recognition of non-formal and informal learning', a rather abstruse and apparently little-used device (Werquin, 2010) to allow the large section of adult learning which takes place outside formal education establishments nevertheless to attract the recognized qualifications which are necessary for transparency in the labour market.



Similarly there is some tension between – on the one hand – the flexibility of many short courses and other less formal learning opportunities which go to make up a rich culture of lifelong learning and – on the other – the emphasis on regulated trades and approved VET programmes which tends to feature in the European Social Model.

Again, there are tensions between transparency and flexibility. While one of the points of a transparent pan-European VET system is to erect the essential architecture to allow differences to co-exist with mutual understanding of, and trust in, vocational outcomes gained in varying ways, this architecture does impose constraints on flexibility within countries. For example it implies the imposition of quality assurance and classifications of some kind, as well as reporting requirements if the ‘transparent’ information is to be transmitted. All this, in theory, adds to costs and to timescales for change, to the detriment of flexibility.

It might be argued also that two different forms of decentralization are not readily compatible. If one delegates the construction of the vocational curriculum to social partners, it would be strange, at the same time, to allow schools or local governments the freedom to ignore them. Decentralization may also clash with Europeanization. The EU’s ‘transparency’ tools presume a degree of co-ordination and regulation at the national level. Similarly, countries participating in the ‘open method of co-ordination’ are expected to report on, and be accountable to, the organs of the EU for progress towards common European economic and social goals (including VET) across their territories; this must presume that they have the capacity at least to chivvy decentralized units to move towards these goals.

But enough of theory and speculation. Having delineated what would appear to be the most important constructs, we shall now examine whether they were actually brought to bear, and if so in what form. To do this we shall look in some depth at the various reports drawn up by the EU during the accession process.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DIAGNOSIS AND PRESCRIPTION: The Policy as Applied during the Accession Process

#### Introduction

This chapter presents findings from a detailed examination of two series of EU documents drawn up in respect of each of the ten eastern European countries preparing for accession in 2004-7.

As we saw in Chapter Six, neither the assessments made under *Agenda 2000* (page 122 above) nor the guides for negotiating the relevant chapters of the *acquis* (page 124) contained much by way of specific requirements on what a suitable VET system in the newly acceding states should look like. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Four, VET policy at the Community level was itself fairly minimal in the early 1990s, being confined, formally at least, to Directives on the mutual recognition of qualifications, the mounting of a number of relatively small-scale community-level programmes and the fostering of pan-community networks organized by agencies such as CEDEFOP.

However, during the 1990s education, and VET in particular, moved higher up the EU agenda as a result of the EU-wide focus on competitiveness for the bloc as a whole, finding expression, first in the *Employment Strategy* of 1997, and then in the *Lisbon Strategy* of 2000. On a rather different tack, the 'tools' for co-operation and transparency in VET began to find expression starting from the initiation of the *Copenhagen* process in 2002.

So the accession process at country level, which formally started in around 1996-7 and finished with the admission of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007,\* was characterized by a shifting policy stance on the part of the Community in relation to the existing member states. Though this shifting position could not be reflected in formal requirements for accession, which were stated at the outset, we may be able to detect whether it was reflected in the demands and recommendations by the Community in relation to the eastern European candidates.

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\* Though we can now report that Croatia joined in July 2013.

As explored in Chapter Five the other dominant feature affecting these countries was the process of political and economic transition which was taking place regardless of their membership or otherwise of the EU. VET was seen, both internally and externally, as a key component in any policy response to these societal pressures. A further question, therefore, is the extent to which the EU took it on itself to offer guidance and support on what the response in terms of VET should be.

Given that the negotiations were taking place throughout the accession period, a good source to reveal the actual policies of the EU regarding VET in the East – the items it focussed on, its criticisms of existing arrangements, the items that it praised or pressed for – are the reports on VET in the East which were drawn up at the time.

As explained in Chapter Two (page 40) the analysis involved examination of all the annual ‘regular reports’ on the negotiations drawn up by the Commission between 1997 and 2005. These were made each year from 1998 to 2002 for all the countries, culminating in a ‘final report’ in 2003 for those countries which acceded at the beginning of 2005, and a further regular report in 2003 and 2004 for Romania and Bulgaria, with a final report for these two countries in 2005. This analysis is also based on a series of ‘Monographs’ drawn up by the European Training Foundation (ETF) between 2002 and 2004 to examine the situation in each country in relation to expected progress in VET (and employment services) towards EU goals (page 126 above).

In the analysis the coding frame derived from the last chapter was used, namely:

- Decentralization
- Europeanization
- Modernization
- Lifelong Learning
- Transparency

Each of the main categories was split into a number of sub-categories relevant to VET, most of which were detailed in the preceding chapter. A further specific category related to EU Directives with which the candidate states would need to conform. In the process of coding certain other themes were added as references to them began to appear frequently in the reports. At the end of the exercise these ‘free’ items were re-classified,

some as new sub-categories within the original groupings, but four further groupings were established:

Social inclusion (references to minorities, regions and gender issues);

Whole system issues (references to participation in VET and upper secondary education, drop-out and educational progression);

Active Labour Market Policies;

Changes to machinery of government.

Finally codes were generated for 'Policy Status' – whether the report appeared to criticize, approve, recommend, note a plan in place, or doubt the capacity for implementation of particular items.

A full listing of the hierarchy of categories and sub-categories, together with the number of references to each in the entire corpus of texts is given in Annex A.

The numerical analysis presented here could be criticized as giving excessive weighting to certain 'standard' items which were invariably commented on in the Commission's progress reports – there was evidently a laid-down template which applied to these reports and which prompted a passage about certain items whether or not there was anything of significance to report; this applied, for example, to participation in the Commission's education programmes which – as we shall see – was not a particularly problematic issue. On the other hand, the very fact that certain items were specified for reporting does surely mean that they were regarded by the Commission as an important element of policy and it is these elements, after all, that we are trying to locate.

It might also be argued that the identification of the pre-set categories listed above, and the brigading of elements of VET practice into these, is somewhat artificial and pre-judges the outcome of the exercise. On the other hand there is evidence, given in the preceding chapter, that these constructs were significant at the time. The facility – used here – to erect further categories, and the fact that some of the presumed categories in the event had few entries, should demonstrate that the approach taken was reasonably robust.

## Results of the analysis

What do the results tell us about the EU's overall preoccupations? The headline results are set out in Table 6. They distinguish between references in the Commission's reports and those made by the ETF. The two sets of reports were made at rather different times and fulfil somewhat different remits. Whereas the Commission's covered all of the items of accession negotiations, the ETF focussed on employment and VET matters. The Commission's reports spanned nearly a decade, whereas the ETF's monographs were confined to the early 2000s. And no doubt the Commission's reports were taken more seriously by the eastern European countries, since they were the authoritative judgement of the Directorate General for Enlargement which directly advised the European Council on accession issues.

**Table 6: References by Theme and Report Type**

Theme	Commission reports	ETF reports
Decentralization	54	75
Directives	105	0
Europeanization	349	103
Lifelong Learning	55	130
Modernization	140	228
Transparency	206	211
Social Inclusion	79	40
Whole system issues	60	104
Active Labour Market Policies	65	38
Machinery of Government	22	11

At this very broad level it is plain that the Commission was more concerned than the ETF with issues pertaining to Europeanization, and with compliance with existing Directives. Issues to do with transparency were important to both bodies. Compared to the Commission, the ETF was concerned with the system within countries as a whole and with its modernization. It was also notably more concerned with lifelong learning, perhaps because EU policy had only started to stress this in the early 2000s after the Lisbon summit – the ETF reports were from this period.

We can look within these broad categories to discover the precise issues which were being remarked upon.

In the case of decentralization, the principal concern was the involvement of 'social partners' in the governance of the system amounting to half of all the references under this theme. However, the main proponent of this interpretation of decentralization was the ETF; the Commission's regular reports tended to give more weight to decentralization to regional and local authorities. There were few references in either sets of reports to looser regulation to give more freedom to schools or advocating autonomy at the school level.

Directives and the business of concluding formal negotiations were largely bound up with the issue of the mutual recognition of diplomas. This issue was only lightly touched upon in the early years (just three references in 1999), but much more heavily remarked on as time went by (26 references, or nearly three for each country by 2002). By the end of the process there were strong warnings, even in the final reports little more than a year from accession, that matters were far from satisfactory. An example gives a typical tone:

Serious concerns exist relating to the Czech Republic's preparations in the area of mutual recognition of professional qualifications. ... The required administrative bodies must be fully established and the capacity to implement this *acquis* reinforced. .... Unless immediate action is taken across an important and extensive range of issues, the Czech Republic will not meet the requirements for membership in this area (Final report on Czech Republic, 2003, p.19)

In contrast the conclusion of negotiations on the formal requirements of 'Chapter 18' concerned with education and training was clearly a relatively straightforward affair; all countries had effectively been signed off in this respect by 2000 (negotiations had 'provisionally closed' in the jargon of the Commission). This was doubtless because the chapter had very few formal requirements.

The theme of Europeanization is to do with adopting 'European practices' either in terms of practices of the existing member states or of the declared policies of the Community. The predominant weight of references is to the latter rather than the former. Participation in EU initiatives – the education programmes, projects under *Phare*, and particularly preparations for

operating the European Social Fund (ESF) are all frequently commented upon. The candidate countries seem eagerly to have taken advantage of the education programmes, including operating the necessary administrative arrangements. On the other hand, the ESF seems to have been an increasing concern as accession loomed, for at that point the new member states would start operating the Fund themselves. There were no references in 1998-9, but over 20 a year in 2000-3. Less than 15 per cent of the references were complimentary – the main concern, amounting to over a third of the references was lack of administrative capacity to operate the ESF. Again an extract gives the flavour:

...the capacity of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour should be strengthened to effectively monitor, evaluate and financially manage the fund, through expansion of its ESF Unit (currently four persons). The tasks of the other intermediate body, the Ministry of Education and Science, have been clarified thanks to the establishment of its own ESF unit. Its staff (currently three persons) should be reinforced. Additional capacity building in the Ministry of Finance is also required .... Co-operation between these bodies should also be improved. (Final report, Lithuania, 2003, pp.34-5)

The second prominent grouping under the theme of Europeanization was that of social dialogue. A specific section on this topic appears in most of the regular EU reports. Under this head countries were expected not just to display a corporatist approach to social and employment policy (through the involvement of employer and trade union organizations at the national level), but also to foster bilateral bargaining between employers and unions. This stance derives from ideas of the 'European Social Model' and has a clear bearing on VET – we have already seen the ETF noting with approval the involvement of social partners in VET governance arrangements. This strand is referred to regularly over the whole period of the reports, and it is clear that the Commission considers that progress has been made – supportive comments balance critical ones. By the end of the period concerns are largely about company-level rather than national arrangements, and about the capacity of employers' organizations and trade unions to engage in meaningful negotiations. There are also some concerns that tripartite negotiations are being conducted for form's sake, with government by far the most powerful party, though sometimes it

seems they were all too real – major trade unions withdrew from negotiations with the government in Poland in 1999 and in Bulgaria in 2005.

Apart from a stress on the importance of social dialogue, there are fewer references to practices in existing member states which those in eastern Europe might copy. There are a number of decidedly vague references to ‘European standards’ of VET, and similarly to ‘alignment’ with European practice. The reference to ‘European standards’ is tantalizing. It could not, surely, refer any common expression of training standards at the European level since efforts to agree these had been aborted much earlier (see Chapter Four, page 77); it could, perhaps, hark back to the early expression of ‘Common Principles’ (page 61); more likely it simply refers, in a general way, to common VET practices in existing member states. More concretely, countries which actively sought out relevant practice abroad, for example by participation in EU networks or bilateral links, are commended. The revival of apprenticeship is also noted in a number of countries where it had been in abeyance under communism – for example Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and quite significantly in Slovenia; however for the most part apprenticeship in its western European sense seems not to have taken off, and indeed to have been positively discouraged in Poland:

... a consistent concept of practical training is lacking. It is mainly applied by the ‘apprenticeship system’ which functions in the crafts sector. However, a new regulation in preparation by the [Ministry of Education] intends to reduce the share of practical training in enterprises in favour of schooling. There are signs that employers will boycott this regulation in 2002. (ETF Monograph, Poland, 2002 p.14)

The import by certain countries of more student-centred teaching methods focussing on problem-solving, rather than acquisition of factual knowledge, and associated with some western European countries, is noted and commended by the ETF. As we saw in Chapter Three, there was a common perception, not least on the part of critics within the countries, that teaching and learning was based on “..an encyclopaedic approach, they neglect individual education, and do not promote the pupil's or student's creativity” (Svecová, 1994, p.117); this was one element of western practice which was frequently imported through the *Phare* support programmes (Smith, 2001).

In contrast to the emphasis on social dialogue, part of the ‘European Social Model’, there are only two references to a more market-orientated



approach in the official Commission reports. The ETF, though, makes a number of references to this, particularly in respect to encouraging (and controlling) a private market for adult training:

...enlarged provision due to establishment of numerous (private) training institutions have contributed to enhancing employability and competitiveness. (ETF Monograph, the Czech Republic, 2002, p.17)

..there is still over-reliance on public institutions, both in education and on the labour market, and a certain distrust towards non-governmental institutions. This has so far led to an underestimating of the role of non-formal and informal learning as opposed to education provided by the formal education system as well as to an underdevelopment of private capacities for the management and implementation of employment measures... (ETF Monograph, Slovenia, 2002, p.68)

The modernization theme is to do with items which suit VET to the new market-orientated economy, or which otherwise mark a departure from communist times. Although it is a major concern of the ETF, the majority of the remarks under this theme in the EU regular reports are very general, referring for example:

Substantial efforts ...[are] needed to develop human resources, notably through training and education helped by reform of the higher and vocational educational systems. These systems have to be in tune with the future needs of the economy. (Bulgaria, EU regular report, 2004 p.86)

...there is a need to increase reform efforts in the areas of technical education and vocational training. (Estonia, EU regular report, 2000, p.30)

Indeed one is rather left with the impression from the Commission reports that reform is desired for its own sake. At first sight it is somewhat disappointing that the Commission does not give a sharper view of what kinds of reforms that it favours, but this focus on 'reform for its own sake' may reflect the frustration of EU officials with the slow-moving approach of the ex-communist education departments, and this may have led to the view that persuading administrations to implement practically any reform would be a mark of real progress.

Of the more specific items under this head, the Commission is most concerned with the issue of relating VET to skills needed in the new economy. While in many cases there are complimentary remarks about the

general levels of education of the populace, there are frequent references to 'mismatch' and the need for 'updating':

The average educational attainment in Latvia is relatively high. In 2000, 19% of the labour force had higher education, a relatively high 62% had second-level, and 18% only basic education. However, the majority of second-level qualifications are vocational; in many cases these vocational qualifications, gained in the past, are over-specialised and not adapted to current and future patterns of skill demand in the economy. (Latvia, EU regular report, 2001, p.36)

The ETF is also plainly interested in curriculum reform within VET. There are references to items associated with modernization in other EU countries, notably modularization, 'key competencies' associated with employability, and the introduction of broader programmes leading to a range of occupations. However the most common specific call is for a greater amount of practical training with employers:

The traditional links between schools and enterprises under the former regime no longer exist. Industrial restructuring led to a decline of specific sectors, and many large companies were closed or reorganised. In parallel, small and medium-sized enterprises gained importance. This development had a big impact on vocational education provision, as practical training is now almost exclusively provided in school-based workshops. (Czech Republic, ETF Monograph, 2002, p.13)

The ETF refers quite frequently to the need for vocational guidance, or plans to provide it. Another fairly common theme is rationalization of the network of schools, a need arising from defunct vocational specializations (and therefore the institutions supporting them) and from demographic decline.

The ETF frequently comments on out-dated equipment in VET schools, and is clearly interested in promoting efforts to introduce computers, which in a number of countries accelerated dramatically (with Estonia the star), often as a result of aid projects.

There are very few references of any kind in the EU regular reports to any aspect of lifelong learning before 2001. Perhaps we should not be too surprised, since officials in DG Enlargement (who wrote the regular reports) may not themselves have been familiar with the term which had not achieved much currency outside educational circles in the 1990s. In the 2002 reports (the last substantive report on most countries), however, there are 18 references, nearly two per country. This 'late showing' of lifelong

learning is likely to reflect the boosting of that theme generally in the EU as a result of the Lisbon Summit in 2000. In fact, though, the references to lifelong learning in the Commission's reports are largely about the formal system for adult and continuing training; indeed the efforts of many of the countries in establishing systems for organizing adult training at all, are frequently remarked upon. It is plain from the reports that the Commission concern is largely with establishing an adult VET system running parallel to that for young people, with recognized institutions, courses and associated qualifications, all subject to quality control:

Improving quality and accountability remain top priorities, as emphasised ...in the proposed Adult Training Law.... Based on the concept of lifelong learning, the proposed Law aims at providing a single regulatory, accreditation and financial framework covering the whole of the adult training sector. (EU regular report, Hungary, 2001, p.69).

There are few (only six in all) references to promoting training by employers.

The ETF, in contrast, has many more references to lifelong learning and seems to distinguish more than the Commission between an organized adult training sector and the more cultural and pervasive concept of lifelong learning which characterized the Commission's 2002 Memorandum on that topic (see page 69 above). This "holistic approach... is still missing" (Monograph on the Czech Republic, 2002, p.13). It is "still not in place" in Estonia (though plans are afoot and consultation under way); it is "not well embedded" in Hungary or "firmly embedded in the mentality of Polish society" (Poland, 2002, p.10) and "only partly" so in Bulgaria. In Romania the lifelong learning vision is "still lacking". In Slovenia "the principle of lifelong learning has been adopted in many recent policy documents [but] measures that would support the implementation of these principles are very scarce in practice" (Slovenia, 2002, p.49).

Like the Commission, the most frequent lifelong learning area to be commented on by the ETF is the adult training sector. The ETF goes into the matter in some depth. It seems that there are a range of issues to be dealt with:

- in a number of countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, Czech Republic) a large number of private training providers grew

up in the 1990s, though they were not regulated and could not offer recognized vocational qualifications;

- at the same time active labour market measures taken through employment services included training programmes, but were co-ordinated through ministries of Labour leading to “the creation of two separate systems. One under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science for initial vocational education and the other under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour for labour market training (primarily for the unemployed).” (ETF Monograph, Lithuania, 2002, p.10);
- arrangements whereby older people could participate in the regular initial VET system in mainstream VET schools, on a part-time or accelerated basis, thus gaining recognized certificates. This element is significant in the Czech Republic and also (though waning) in Poland. But in other cases it is small and there are difficulties in stimulating schools to be responsive:

It seems that there is a fear within the formal system that the introduction of some innovations may endanger the established position of schools, while at the same time their own adjustment to changing conditions is very slow. (ETF Monograph, Slovenia, 2002, p.37)

The recipe for this involved picture is to introduce accreditation for the new private sector, thereby permitting the providers to offer ‘flexible’ qualifications in exchange for agreeing to quality assurance measures (Hungary, Estonia, Romania), to introduce some new, more specialized and responsive, state-run education centres for adults (Hungary, Poland), and to press for greater co-ordination between the ministries, perhaps resulting eventually in a unified system (ETF Monograph on Slovenia, 2002).

Unlike the Commission, the ETF pays attention to training by employers, in most cases noting that this is relatively low compared with the older member states (the Czech Republic and Estonia seem to be exceptions). But apart from pointing out that this needs to be developed, there are few specific policy ideas – the employer levy introduced by Hungary is noted, but not commended; tax incentives are, however, mentioned in a few cases.

It is plain that the theme of transparency is a significant one, though seldom referred to directly. Both the Commission and the ETF set considerable store by candidate countries participating in open planning exercises, setting targets and being prepared to be held to account for them. There is a rapid increase in 2000 to references in particular to the Joint Assessment Papers (see page 126 above) and National Action Plans for Employment, a device introduced as part of the *Employment Strategy*; in relation to VET, these cover both short-term action on training as an active labour market policy for the unemployed, and longer-term actions to strengthen the VET system as a whole.

But the emphasis on published plans goes wider than these 'set piece' exercises. There are many references to 'human resource' components of National Development Plans. More specifically, Bulgaria drafted a 'National Education Strategy' and a 'national concept' for VET (EU Regular Report, 1998), in 2002 the Czech Republic adopted a 'long-term strategy on education', while in 1998 Estonia is criticized for "lacking a clearly defined policy and strategy in the field of labour market and human resources development" (Regular Report, p.33). A further 'concept' (on "the Development of Education") appears in the Latvian regular report of 2002, and in 2001 Poland adopted a "Strategy for Development of National Education for 2001-2006" (Regular Report, 2002, p.99). Slovakia was evidently very busy on this front: 'strategic documents' concerning VET were 'approved' by the Government in December 1999, January 2000 and May 2001 (Regular Reports for 2000 and 2001). We might note the use of 'approval' by governments in this context, which seems a little odd – one might expect governments to devise plans or to present them, rather than to endorse them as if they came from elsewhere. The likely explanation is that many of these plans were initiated, and sometimes written, as a result of external aid projects.

Legislation is a step on from having formal plans. The countries, and the EU, considered it necessary to enshrine their education and VET policies in specific laws. The Commission makes 34 references to these laws and the ETF makes 23 references. Apart from modernizing the legal basis for education (which had often been done earlier in the 1990s, though sometimes needing amendment), the laws mentioned are frequently to do

with giving a legal basis for adult education and for instituting new systems for accreditation of providers and for qualifications.

On the same theme of governance, there are also a number of references to the introduction of 'arms-length' agencies to manage VET or aspects of it. These sometimes, but not always, involve an element of social partnership; even without the 'partners' it is clearly felt helpful either to distance VET somewhat from the normal business of a ministry in order to give it an explicit managerial focus or to bind in stakeholders. Thus a National Agency for Vocational Education and Training was established in Bulgaria in the late 1990s. Estonia created both a School Network Administration Office, charged with implementing VET reforms, and an Estonian Qualifications Authority, as well as a National Adult Education Council, supported by an Institute for Adult Education. Latvia created a Council for Co-operation in Vocational Education in 2000, and Lithuania formed a Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority. In 2001 Slovakia created a Council for Vocational Training – "a positive development" according to the regular report of 2002 (p.94). Romania created a National Centre for the Development of Vocational and Technical Education\* within its Education Ministry, and in 2004 a tripartite National Adult Training Board took over the functions of the previous Council for Occupational Standards and Assessment. Slovenia had a Centre for Vocational Education and Training and an Institute for Adult Education, advised (respectively) by a Council of Experts for Vocational and Technical Education and a Council of Experts for Adult Education.

The other strand to the theme of transparency concerns qualifications and standards which give public recognition to achievement and quality. Altogether 50 references to these matters are made by the Commission and over 100 by the ETF. Although the idea of being certified or licensed to engage in different types of economic activity had been a feature of communist times, this seems to have been considered – by the EU or the new administrations – to have been a somewhat murky process, depending largely on attendance on a programme of study during initial vocational education and training, and on subsequent progression within a state enterprise. There is evident pressure in the reformed systems for

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\* This is the office that I visited that day in January 2005 (page 7)

standards to be public and explicitly based on the new requirements of market-orientated industry, and for assessments to be able to withstand public scrutiny. In particular there is pressure for adults, on re-training, to have access to public qualifications and for this access not to depend on their having attended courses in the mainstream school system, or indeed necessarily having attended courses of training at all. A few extracts give the flavour:

Amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training ...aim at a more detailed and comprehensive regulation of the acquisition of professional qualifications. The amendments also modified licensing procedures for training institutions to provide training leading to state-recognised vocational qualifications. (EU regular report, Bulgaria, 2003, p.86)

The National Institute for Vocational Education has started a rolling programme to update and modernise the National Vocational Qualification Register in line with the changing needs of the economy. (EU regular report, Hungary, 2000, p.60)

Employees can have qualifications acquired in the course of work certified in front of state examination boards appointed by school superintendents, thus obtaining the title of skilled worker or master craftsman in a given profession. There are also examination boards appointed by employers (e.g. the chamber of crafts) which certify equivalent qualifications ... (ETF Monograph, Poland, 2002, p.18)

...the Act on National Occupational Qualifications ... was initially intended to regulate the acquisition of a limited number of qualifications for which the formal education system did not provide education programmes ... In its final version, it now regulates more generally the procedures, bodies and organisations competent for approving standards for selected qualifications as the basis for assessment and recognition of prior and non-formal learning. (ETF Monograph, Slovenia, 2002, pp.10-11)

It seems that the system for certifying vocational skills was seen both as a key means of influencing system reform (to a more varied array of training pathways) and to modernizing content through industry-related standards. References to aspirations for a National Qualifications Framework are made in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia, all relating to 2001 or earlier – considerably before the idea of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) saw the light of day in the *Maastricht Communiqué* of December 2004 (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and European Commission, 2004).

Indeed, work on national frameworks did not begin in many of the older member states until the promulgation of the EQF in 2008 (CEDEFOP, 2010), with most still remaining to be implemented even today (Raffe, 2013). In this respect it seems that policy in the new member states preceded that in the older ones by a considerable margin.

We may also note an emphasis on standards in vocational education (in the sense of attainments for individuals to reach). Work on these (or in the case of Poland, the need for them) is mentioned in six out of the ten countries. More specifically, references to 'occupational standards' are made in the cases of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Latvia. This is interesting as being associated with the earlier development of National Vocational Qualifications in the UK. In the same vein there are references to 'competency-based' standards in the ETF Monographs for the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Although there is not a large number of references to the quality of vocational education, it is noticeable that they increase, rather than decrease, over the period. Better assessments and examinations are most commonly mentioned as the means of achieving improved quality.

Training as part of active labour market policies to counter unemployment is mentioned frequently, particularly in the Commission's regular reports. The references increase in frequency with time; by the end of the period the Commission comments on these measures as a standard item within the Employment and Social Affairs section of the reports. In general it seems that progress is being made, but that more needs to be done. The ETF also comments, and frequently considers that training is too small an element in the array of active policies, for example:

Although passive measures\* still represent the bulk of labour-market policies, the authorities have designed and implemented an increasing array of active measures. These, however, are still heavily concentrated on subsidies to employment rather than training measures. (EU regular report, Romania, 2002, p.48)

Under the category of social inclusion the majority of references are to issues concerned with minorities. The great majority of these concern the Roma population, featuring in the reports on all the countries with the

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\* See Glossary for difference between 'active' and 'passive' measures.



exception of the Baltic States – these however contain references to the Russian-speaking minority. The situation of the Roma is increasingly seen as intractable. A number of countries made considerable efforts to extend the education of Roma (who often did not even complete primary school) and to integrate their schooling with the mainstream population; it was frequently segregated through allocating Roma children to ‘special’ schools for those with learning difficulties. Extracts from the final reports before accession point to continuing problems:

The strategic documents and programmes on the educational integration of children from the Roma minority have not significantly changed the situation on the ground. Initiatives aimed at attracting and keeping Roma children in school (e.g. free lunches, subsidised textbooks, teacher assistants in schools with Roma students, bussing programmes) were largely unsuccessful. Although an Agency for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities has been established, this body has not succeeded so far in ... the coordination of efforts made by different ministries to enhance the educational integration of children from minorities. (EU final report, Bulgaria, 2005, p.15)

The overall responsibility for Roma affairs was transferred to the Prime Minister’s Office. However, despite these developments, ...the majority of persons belonging to the Roma community are still exposed to social inequalities, social exclusion and widespread discrimination in education, employment and access to public services. Segregation in schools has remained a serious problem. The long-term Roma strategy announced under the previous Government has still not been adopted either. (EU final report, Hungary, 2003, p.37)

Romania, though, is an exception with its last report mentioning that “positive developments have been made in improving access of Roma to education and health sectors.” (EU final report, Romania, 2005, p.19).

There are very few references to gender issues in any of the reports; those that exist merely report that boys are more likely to take VET programmes than girls (by no means an advantage). There are rather more references to disadvantaged regions, usually rural areas with restricted opportunities for initial VET or re-training.

Comments on the education system as a whole are much more likely to be made by the ETF than by the Commission (see Table 6). This may reflect both the lack of educational expertise by the authors of the Commission reports, and the fact that the reports focused more explicitly (though far

from exclusively) on the formal *acquis* which had little locus in the field of education. Taking both sources together, though, the references are numerous and tend to focus on:

- finance – not just the lack of adequate funding (in Romania and Bulgaria especially) or commendation for increasing it (Poland and Latvia gain honourable mentions), but some particular issues such as the low pay for teachers (Czech Republic, Latvia, Hungary), lack of resourcing for adult training (both employed and unemployed), and inability to scale up promising initiatives which have been piloted (Lithuania);
- participation at upper secondary level is favourably commented on in many cases, though referred to as low but improving in Poland and Slovakia, and still problematic by the time of the ETF Monograph in Romania;
- more specifically the incidence, and particularly the status, of VET within secondary education, where it was losing out to competition with general education. This was more a concern of the ETF, which mentions the decline of VET and problems with its image in many countries, as in Poland:

The old system could be described in outline as an overemphasis on vocational education at secondary level (rather diversified, with four different types of VET schools), suffering from an image of providing education that was too narrowly profiled, outdated and overlong, and even considered as producing the unemployed. The tradition of maintaining certain types of VET schools prevailed and a clear vision of VET was lacking. (2002, p.1 4)

Romania and Slovenia, though, are mentioned as cases where the popularity of VET held up fairly well.



### **Country differences**

How much did these themes differ between countries? Table 7 gives the number of references to each of the top ten items in the Commission's reports, with the shading indicating those items which are significantly different from the average.

**Table 7: Common themes by country**

	Est	Lat	Lit	Pol	Cz R	Slk	Hun	Slv	Bul*	Ro*
European Social Model	12	9	9	9	10	13	10	9	16	12
Participation in EU initiatives	9	9	9	6	8	9	9	10	11	13
JAP or NAPE	7	8	6	7	10	9	5	11	12	10
Mutual recognition	10	8	7	8	10	11	7	6	9	9
ESF	6	9	6	9	6	10	5	11	8	8
Minorities-Disadvantage	2	2	1	0	11	12	12	3	9	12
Active Labour Market Policies	3	10	5	5	4	5	2	5	14	6
Modernization	9	10	5	5	4	5	1	2	8	2
Projects	6	2	5	2	6	0	3	1	4	3
Skills mismatch-LMI	5	2	1	7	1	7	1	3	5	0

\*Bulgarian and Romanian figures have been adjusted to take account of the fact that they had two more reports than the other countries.

 Less than half the average  
 More than twice the average

The two items for which there is the greatest variance are those for minorities/disadvantage and for skills mismatch. In the former case the countries with a low incidence had very few Roma. The skills mismatch variance may be explained by the fact that the issue was less of a factor in countries where the industrial base was not greatly changing (Czech Republic and Hungary), or where a new industrial base had yet to grow up (Romania).

Apart from these two items the noteworthy thing is how constant the issues are for all the countries. This would point to a conclusion that the EU's policy on VET for eastern Europe was generated, not by the particular needs of each country, but by a vision held by the Commission and the ETF of what VET should be like.

### **Judgements on items and countries**

Items were coded, where applicable, by whether actions in the country were being approved or criticized. Table 8 shows the five items most likely to have a balance of criticism (*i.e.* the largest number of critical references after netting off the positive ones) and, on the other hand, those with the greatest balance of approval (*i.e.* favourable references minus critical ones).

**Table 8: Most Critical and Most Favourable References (ETF and Commission combined)**

Balance Critical		Balance Favourable	
Adult Training Sector	-15	Participation in EU initiatives	+29
Lifelong Learning	-14	JAP or NAPE plans	+9
Active Labour Market Policies	-13	Modernization	+9
Open planning	-10	Apolitical governance	+7
Financing	-8	Preparing for the ESF	+5

The weak development of lifelong learning, including the adult training sector, is plain. Both the Commission and the ETF are critical of slowness to adopt active labour market measures – again linked to training for adults. The criticisms under the ‘open planning’ item were largely to do with absence of comprehensive plans for education or lifelong learning.

On the other hand, countries were quick to implement the education programmes as part of the EU initiatives and to engage with the planning system of the *Employment Strategy*. At the most general level, their preparedness to undertake some modernization of their VET systems was praised. The establishment of VET Agencies and the like was very frequently commended – an example of apolitical governance.

Problems with administrative capacity were mentioned frequently. The most common item here was the capability of running EU projects and programmes and particularly readiness to administer the European Social Fund, though the Commission recognized that countries were making strenuous efforts to make prepare. There was also concern about the capacity of employer organizations and unions to undertake meaningful negotiations with the government and (particularly) with each other.

Although overall expressions of approval in the Commission’s reports increased over time, so did the number of criticisms – at least until the final round of reports, which unlike the earlier ones focussed strictly on items in the formal *acquis*. Worries about capacity and recommendations for improvement increased over the period before accession. In some cases there were concerns that agreed actions were not being implemented.

Finally it is possible to construct a league table of countries by the EU judgments made of them, combining those of the Commission and the ETF:

**Table 9: Countries by approval/criticism**

Country	Balance Favourable/Unfavourable
Hungary	16
Slovenia	14
Czech Republic	8
Estonia	6
Lithuania	-4
Slovakia	-6
Romania	-7
Latvia	-17
Poland	-18
Bulgaria	-32

On VET matters, therefore, Hungary fulfils its ambition to be ‘top of the class’ (Prime Minister Viktor Orbán quoted in Kosztolányi, 2000), and Bulgaria is by some measure the most problematic. The situation of Poland is a little surprising and may be not so much due to lack of capacity or intrinsic problems as to deliberate policy, with the government at one point taking an apparently anti-VET stance. The ETF Monograph of 2002 records that Poland “made less progress in many respects than other Central European countries in restructuring and updating its secondary education system...” Indeed government actions at the end of the 1990s were severely tilted against VET, “with a strong focus on general and higher education” and with the intent of:

abolishing almost all types of VET schools and qualifications at secondary level (policy target of the previous government to shift from about 60% VET participation to 20% in 2004). (p.12).

Poland may have been following the advice of certain international commentators who favoured a deliberate tilt towards general education (page 103 above). However, this policy was modified by a new government in 2001.

### **Elements of policy**

What can we conclude from this in terms of EU policy on VET? In the first place it is clear that the Commission used the regular reports to comment

quite widely on aspects of VET policy, even though these did not feature as part of the *acquis*. Though adverse comments were not pressed in the final reports before accession, the intention was surely to influence VET policy in the candidate countries.

Our finding that there was a consistent indication of the direction in which countries' VET practices should develop, which did not differ much between the various countries, would seem to point to the fact that the Commission had developed a 'preferred model' of VET systems and was not trying to make prescriptions to suit individual country circumstances.

The first, explicit (and understandable) element in that steerage was that the countries should comply with the Directive on mutual recognition and participate in the various EU initiatives relevant to VET. Compliance with the Directive was at first seen as unproblematic, but the process ended with something of a scramble to get everything into place. Participation in the education programmes was achieved early on, though with some doubts about administrative capacity. There were more severe doubts about capacity to use the ESF funds after accession.

A second strong strand is a focus on those elements of VET which had a bearing on the European Employment Strategy. As we saw in Chapter Four, this was the earliest manifestation of the 'open method of co-ordination', and the Commission was intent on engaging the candidate countries in it. The emphasis on active labour market measures – and to a certain extent the broader concern with adult training – can be explained in this way, but perhaps more significant is the focus on the cycle of planning, making public commitments and opening one's policies and practices to external scrutiny – that is to engage in 'transparency'. In contrast to this definite script emerging from DG Employment, there does not seem to have been an equivalent approach from the Commission's education interests, whose main concern, at least in the early stages of accession, seems to have been that the countries should engage with its suite of education programmes.

There is evidence that this emphasis on 'open' planning went wider than participation in the *Employment Strategy*, and was expected of countries in respect to their VET (and education) systems as a whole. Clearly countries struggled with this: plans were some time in coming, were often criticized

for not being sufficiently comprehensive, and often seemed to confront difficulties in implementation.

There was also a presumption that a new legislative base was an essential precursor to effective action. Allied to this was a preference for decentralization to the regions, involvement of 'social partners', and the establishment of agencies at an arm's length relationship to ministries. In short, there is something of a distrust of political governance and a bias towards more technocratic and legalistic approaches.

This preference for the technocratic approach, together with clear evidence that the central EU institutions were seeking to extend to the East the ground that they had won through the *Employment Strategy*, provides a considerable amount of evidence to support the neo-functionalist interpretation of EU integration.

Though there are plenty of references to market mechanisms in other parts of the Commission's 'regular reports' which deal with the need for a 'functioning market economy' and the 'capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union' (to take two standard sections of the reports), there was little by way of suggestion that VET should use market mechanisms to achieve the greater match to labour market requirements that was urged. Instead the scientific calibration of formal standards to the needs of employment and the involvement of employers and unions in the governance of VET are the mechanisms which are favoured.

The numerous references to social partnership contrast with the lack of emphasis on the 'market' as means of steering VET. This evidence of the EU in the late 1990s surely does not support those commentators who point to the role of supranational organizations in spreading a new neo-liberal educational orthodoxy. Rather, as we noted in Chapter Six, the emphasis seems to be to extend to the East the 'settlement' which had been achieved in the West between the competing 'varieties of capitalism'.

While reform of initial VET was clearly regarded as important, there is little indication from the Commission's reports as to what such reform might comprise, beyond a perception that the VET programmes on offer were out of step with the actual opportunities of the new labour market, and that 'updating' would rectify this. The overall levels of secondary education

were often commended, though some (unspecific) problems with 'quality' were increasingly referred to. The ETF went into the matter of initial VET in considerably more detail; there is some evidence, in the ETF reports, of a preferred reform package for initial VET (modularization, broader occupational groupings, key competencies, more student-centred approaches).

However, despite the few tantalizing references to 'European standards', there is very little to indicate that either the Commission or the ETF had any practices of VET in existing member states in mind when they made criticisms and recommendations for action in respect of the East. Indeed, there is very little by way of comparison – either between the eastern countries and those in the West, or between the emerging practices in the East and those undertaken during communism. The criticisms of eastern countries seemed not to derive from an assumption either that they were 'behind' the West, or that the Communist system had provided a poor basis for VET. This absence of a perception that the East was deficient compared with West or had been disadvantaged by its prior history may simply have been diplomatic. On the other hand it may reflect the fact that the Commission was, at the same time, making critiques of the existing member states as part of the *Employment Strategy*, as it would later as part of *Lisbon Process*; this being the case it would not have wished to limit its room for manoeuvre by commending their practices in its dealings with the East.

The ETF did firmly pinpoint problems concerned with lack of practical training. Their perspective was that previous links with large state-owned enterprises had disappeared, leaving a school-based, largely theoretical and technical curriculum. Practical training was badly needed to counterbalance this, preferably through new links with the emerging private-sector firms, but – failing that – through better-equipped training workshops in schools. This concern was paralleled by a perception that VET pedagogy needed reform, away from traditional, subject-based, and theoretical instruction. Student-centred approaches were commended to encourage problem-solving, key skills for employability and an emphasis on enterprise at the personal level. Again, this does not at all seem to exemplify the 'neo-liberal' consensus in international educational policymaking characterized by Ball (2007) as seeking to oppose



“...progressive experimentation in educational methods...” and replace it with “...a set of reinvented traditional pedagogies” (p.38). Indeed, in the case of the EU in the 1990s, the opposite seems to have been the case.

There were clearly problems with adult training – a topic which was not an issue in communist times. For the Commission, remedying this was largely a matter of developing a distinct sector of adult VET provision, whether through the initial VET schools or otherwise. Even though half of the Commission’s reports were made after the establishment of lifelong learning as a key theme of the 2000 Lisbon Summit, they contain few references to this wider agenda. In contrast the ETF was concerned not only with the adult training sector, but also with in-company training and with achieving a balance between formal, non-formal, and informal forms of VET, together with a balance between the private and the public sectors, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each. It is perhaps a shame that the rather richer analysis of the ETF was not reflected more widely in the influential ‘regular reports’.

Qualifications were seen as an important element in achieving transparency and improving quality. A more formal system of qualifications would make achievement more visible in the new market economies, particularly if it could recognize achievement outside the traditional initial VET system. Not only this, but if based on well-researched standards, qualifications could act as a mechanism to match VET to the requirements of contemporary industry. Finally, objective assessments to such standards could improve quality by removing reliance on dubious, out-dated curricula which were determined by what communist-era schools could provide.

As well as considering what the EU included in its VET policies, it is also worth commenting on two items which did not feature. First, though there are plenty of references to the Directives on mutual recognition of qualifications, the main purpose of which are to facilitate the free movement of workers, there are no references to the more general issue of migration in a VET context, even though it became apparent as accession approached, both that many eastern European workers would want to work in the higher-paying existing member states, and that many of these were demanding ‘transitional’ measures to limit migrants. This was controversial territory (which perhaps explains the lack of references to it), and must

have raised the question just why eastern countries should invest heavily in vocational education when it was surely apparent that many of those that they trained would take their skills elsewhere.

Nor is there much reference to the role of VET in equalizing access to the labour market from the socio-economic point of view. Though Brine (1998) points to growing EU concerns about social exclusion at the time, the interpretation, at least in the accession context, seems confined to certain minority ethnic issues – most notably the Roma and in some countries to minority language groups – and also to problems of certain (usually rural) regions. Socio-economic divisions surely went wider than this. It may be that this was an alien concept in previously communist societies, where such divisions could not – ideologically speaking – obtain. But the ‘new reality’ of open product markets and flexible labour markets would all too predictably open up socio-economic divisions, even if they were not already present. It seems that this kind of thinking, though very common within existing member states, was not something with which the Commission was concerned, perhaps because this was seen as a matter for domestic policy, or perhaps because it did not fit easily within the Commission’s fairly standard frames of reference for social policies: policy on minorities; spatial policy on disadvantaged regions; and policy on the unemployed. The idea that there might be a more generalized, systemic and class-based source of inequality of access is notable by its absence. This dimension seems to have been ‘off limits’ for the EU.

These two unaddressed issues may indicate that there were limitations to what matters the central EU institutions could deal with, and that they preferred to stay on the relatively safe territory of what had previously been agreed in the context of the established member states. To open up such matters could upset previously hard-fought settlements.

## CHAPTER NINE

### A REMEDY IS APPLIED: Support for Stabilization and Development

#### Introduction

As well as the 'stick' of pressure to abide by its rules and norms in the run-up to accession, the EU also offered a 'carrot' to eastern European countries in the form of programmes of support to enable them to improve their VET systems. Indeed this programme of aid, called *Phare*<sup>\*</sup>, pre-dated the start of the accession negotiations, being eventually superseded by the structural funds available to all EU states once they became members.

This chapter examines the strand of *Phare* directed towards VET as it developed over time, explains how it operated and considers whether it contained any consistent prescriptions for moving eastern VET in particular directions.

Aid had been a long-established activity of the EU; a European Development Fund had been established as early as 1958 and, by the late 1980s, amounted to over five per cent of the Community's budget, most significantly in the form of the *Lomé Convention* which governed co-operation between the EU and a wide range of African countries (European Commission, 1990a). According to the Commission the aim of this programme was not only to "narrow the gap between rich and poor countries", and to "enhance Europe's economic potential", but also "to contribute to peace and stability in the world." (p.4)

We noted in Chapter Six that immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the EU had made a decision to create a stabilization fund for Poland and Hungary (page 114), and at the same Strasbourg Summit it determined to set up a European vocational training foundation.

Though "used primarily to support the process of reform by financing of projects aimed at economic restructuring" (European Council, 1989a, Article 3) the aid programme was wide-ranging, covering for example infrastructure and border security. However, training was particularly

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<sup>\*</sup> See Glossary.

mentioned, and from its beginning *Phare* incorporated projects to assist the reformation of VET. It is not possible to give a precise figure on VET expenditure under *Phare* for the entire period, but the Commission's annual report in the programme of 2000 contained a breakdown showing €1,100m having been spent on "Education, Training and Research" from the inception of the programme, or some 14 per cent of the total (DG Enlargement, 2001, p.118). Given that finance for research in the accession countries was not likely to have been large, and that primary and general education were generally in scope to other donors such as the World Bank, it seems reasonable to suppose that something approaching an average of €100m per annum was spent on aid to VET and higher education across the ten countries. Masson (2003, p.21) estimates that the majority of the funds went towards higher education through the *Tempus* programme and that up until 1998 only eight per cent of the total for education, training and research was devoted to VET. This, however, is likely to be an underestimate since there will have been VET measures in the increasingly important employment field (eg. active labour market measures), and training was frequently an important feature of projects in other sectors, ranging from agriculture to improving the capacity of the administrations.

A regulation for the establishment of the promised European Training Foundation (ETF) was also quickly passed. As well as designing and commissioning aid projects, the ETF was to "provide assistance in the definition of training needs and priorities" and to "disseminate information and encourage exchanges of experience, through publications, meetings, and other appropriate means" (Council of the European Communities, 1990, pp.6-7). The Commission had in mind that "it should be set up very quickly during 1990" (European Commission, 1990b, p.2), and it considered that the new ETF should be separate from CEDEFOP to "safeguard the existing (tripartite) role of CEDEFOP as an intra community training agency." It was originally envisaged that the new organization should be co-located with CEDEFOP in Berlin in order to save costs and to "benefit from...CEDEFOP's experience and contacts in the training field" (p.5). In the event, though, there were considerable delays and it was not until 1994 that the ETF became operational, based in Turin.

## **The phases of *Phare***

Masson (2003) sets out a number of changes in aid policy so far as it affected VET. In the early days of *Phare*, up until around 1993, it was 'demand driven', with proposals for projects coming from the countries themselves, moderated by DG Enlargement. In this first phase the stress was on particular training projects in various sectors of the economy, for example in re-training workers made redundant from declining industries. By 1993, however, it was considered that there should be efforts to bring about change in the eastern European VET systems themselves. Rather than attempt this directly, the approach was rather to retain the 'bottom up' aspect of the earlier policy by intervening at the local, rather than national, level. A distinctive pattern began to emerge of a limited number of 'pilot schools' intended to act as a demonstration of 'modern' methods (which we shall describe later), followed by dissemination.

At around the same time, and also clearly with the intention of influencing the development of VET systems, though without any explicit central agenda, the ETF became engaged in:

setting up a network of national observatories designed to provide structured information and analyses on national vocational education and training policies .... The expertise acquired was to enable the national observatories to contribute actively to the national debate on the reform of training systems. (Masson, 2003, p.35)

These research-orientated centres served to provide relevant statistics and cross-country comparisons of VET to inform, and challenge, policy-making. The ETF involved staff from these institutions in its country reviews, and some went on to occupy positions in national policymaking and in the *Phare* projects. In time some of the observatories accreted other functions such as acting as centres for CEDEFOP's *Refernet* system of information exchange between countries.

The intention seems clear – to stimulate change by demonstrating modern practice amongst practitioners, while providing the means for domestic commentators to prompt change at national level. This emphasis on influencing national VET policy became more explicit in a number of countries in the later 1990s where support was given for "drafting green or white papers" (p.34).

However, there was a change of strategy from 1998-9 when the programme became very much more explicitly 'accession driven'. This, of course, marked the time when negotiations on membership had formally opened with each of the countries and an agenda of items started to be generated through the 'Accession Partnerships' (Chapter Six – page 122). So, instead of responding to local needs, the *Phare* programme became tied to the specific agenda of the EU for each country. This meant that project proposals should emanate from agreed action plans negotiated as part of the accession process, including in time National Development Plans, and reflect items which had been identified as important to secure a smooth transition to EU norms.

As we have noted in Chapter Six there was little in the formal *acquis* which impinged on VET, but Masson notes:

...it was also felt important to assess carefully how far the 'non-formal' or 'soft' *acquis* concerning VET were considered by the candidate countries. This referred to the ability of the countries to take on board general VET objectives in EU policy documents. This included the training-related guidelines included in the general framework of the European Employment Strategy... (p.41)

The overall aims of *Phare* at this time tended to be directed to strengthening capacity in institutions, to investments which would result in being able to comply with EU norms (for example in environmental matters), and towards an ability to compete within the Single Market. Increasingly, also, the programme was seen as a pre-cursor to the country's participation in the EU structural funds once it joined the EU (for VET, this would mean the European Social Fund). This pointed to using *Phare* to overcome regional disparities and for alleviating the position of disadvantaged minorities (eg. the Roma). The result of all these changes meant that, for a period, *Phare* in the field of VET stopped being directed towards VET policy and practice, and reflected more the interests of promoting social dialogue, enhancing employment services, helping to institute active labour market measures, and addressing regional issues. The corollary, as Masson notes, was that *Phare* support was diverted away from ministries of education and towards ministries of labour. There was something of a hiatus in the 'policy orientated' aid that had been gathering pace in the earlier period.

As well as the content of projects, the EU took a keen interest in bringing the country's administration to a position where it could sensibly manage and account for *Phare* VET projects (DG Enlargement, 2002).

After the Lisbon Summit of 2000, which introduced lifelong learning as a theme, the path was again open for *Phare* to pay attention to national VET policies as a whole, rather than in their regional or solely employment-related dimensions. With the launch of the *Copenhagen Process* in 2002 a fresh agenda opened up concerning the development in the East of the new 'tools' for co-operation such as qualifications frameworks and quality assurance methods.

### **Mode of operation**

VET projects under *Phare* were for a time initially managed by the ETF, through teams appointed by in the various countries, aided by foreign experts ('technical assistance'). However when *Phare* became more 'accession-driven' the ETF stepped back into an advisory role. At that time it started to perform wider functions – of contributing to the 'regular reports' on accession and feeding information into the *Employment Strategy*. Also during the 'accession-driven' phase, the participation of appointed foreign experts was largely replaced by 'twinning' arrangements whereby ministries and institutions in the candidate countries were paired with equivalents in established member states. Later on, however, 'technical assistance' teams were re-instated through a tendering process.

As *Phare* matured a standard mode of operation emerged:

- at the highest level needs across all the relevant sectors in a country were identified in the Accession Partnerships incorporating both a 'National Programme for the Adoption of the *Acquis*' and the National Development Programme for "promoting economic and social cohesion in the candidate countries" (DG Enlargement, 2002, p.10);
- from this a series of 'project fiches' were derived, spelling out the aims of individual projects and the resources agreed in respect of each;

- in turn, from these fiches, individual 'terms of reference' were drawn up giving a detailed specification of what was desired from each project. These were made available to a short-list of organizations which had expressed an interest in tendering for a given project, and which the Commission had judged competent to make a realistic bid;
- finally a tendering process took place, in which bidders outlined how they envisaged tackling the terms of reference, the personnel they proposed to deploy, and the price they would charge. The selected contractor was then responsible for delivering the project, subject to various monitoring procedures involving both the Commission and officials from the country concerned, typically arranged as a steering group.

In the case of VET, these procedures gave rise to a fairly limited group of specialist tendering organizations,\* which developed mechanisms for writing proposals and for assembling at short notice teams of suitably qualified 'international experts' who matched the fairly detailed specifications for 'key personnel'. The terms of reference typically demanded that a number of these experts be foreign, with a view to importing relevant practices from existing member states. This example of a 'person specification' comes from the (unpublished) terms of reference of a *Phare* project in Romania which took place in 2004-5.

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\* Organizations in the UK included, for example, IMC Consulting (formerly involved in restructuring in British coalfields, and now part of White, Young Green), Cambridge Education, the British Council and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.



**International Key expert 3: Expert for implementation of Qualification Framework (7 months)**

*Qualifications and skills*

He (she) will be a University graduate in a field related to Services. He/she will provide evidence of direct involvement in the institutional development of a national vocational qualification system and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in his/her country of origin and abroad. especially for consultancy and training purpose. Proficiency in English is a requirement

*General professional experience*

He/she will have a minimum of 10 years experience in the field of national vocation and education policies. including initial, post-secondary and continuing vocational education and training systems and will have worked during the past 5 years at least in developing and implementing action plans and procedures for setting up a qualification framework, including the definition of qualifications, the developments of qualifications and social partner involvement and quality assurance arrangements

*Specific professional experience*

He/she has been directly involved in the development of national qualifications, including the establishment of a register and certification procedures and the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms, including assessment and verification procedures. He/she has an overview of the development of qualification systems in a number of European countries.

These personnel were typically complemented by 'local experts' from the country concerned, who could help the foreigners navigate the internal system as well as providing technical expertise of their own.

Terms of reference for projects were fairly specific, very often requiring the 'technical assistance' team to perform in an executive and operational, rather than advisory, capacity. The same Romanian project, for example, expected the consultants to organize a large-scale curriculum development exercise:

***Task 5. Training Standards and curriculum development***

Outputs: (i) about 350 training standards for the existing qualifications at levels 1-3 and level 4 non university education to be elaborated/updated according to the evolution of technologies and work management,

(ii) about 600 curriculum modules elaborated, representing the revised framework adopted during the Phare TVET 0108 project. Special attention will be focused on level 3 and 4 of the vocational qualifications. Updating of levels 1 and 2 will be done to meet the requirements of the Regional Education Action Plans (REAPs) and LEAPs [Local Education Action Plans]

The Consultant will prepare, organise and deliver training programmes to continue the development and updating of training standards and curricula for 100 schools and 22 resource centres.

The bids from competing organizations were scored partly on the merits of the written proposal, but more so on the attributes of the various 'key

experts' who were to be deployed, based on their *curriculum vitae*, and sometimes also involving interviews.

As a counterpart to the technical assistance team, countries were expected to set up a 'Programme Implementation (or Management) Unit' (PIU or PMU). This could be a single official designated to liaise with the project, or a group of officials within a ministry or agency. In a number of cases, for example in Romania, the PIU evolved into a semi-autonomous unit within government concerned with VET development.

### **The content of *Phare***

During the course of the 1990s a discernible pattern evolved in *Phare* VET projects, as summarized by the ETF in a review which drew on a number of individual evaluation reports (ETF, 2001). Individual projects were typically charged with drawing up new 'modernized' curricula for vocational subjects; there were a number of dimensions to this, involving the elaboration of programmes for 'new' subjects such as informatics, and for expected growth areas such as tourism. These reformed curricula also attempted a broader scope than the previous, highly specialized, versions of communist times.

Beyond this, the projects often incorporated recent new ideas in curriculum design, including outcome-based goals or occupational standards, "competency-based assessment and certification" (p.12), the inclusion of cross-curricular "key skills", and often a modular approach to curriculum design. We shall explore this 'curriculum package' in more detail in a moment.

Projects also typically included the training of school managers in school development planning, budgeting, personnel management, management of change, networking and marketing. For teachers the training was not only in the new curricula and their modern design features, but also more generally in topics such as occupational mapping and functional analysis, standards, the modular curriculum approach, new (less didactic) teaching methods, student assessment and key skills (p.17).

Typically one third of a project's budget was devoted to the upgrading of buildings and equipment, so that the new curricula could be taught with up-

to-date machinery and in attractive surroundings. Study visits to counterparts in established EU member states were arranged.

Though the interventions in individual schools were intended to be about “empowering staff at a local level to develop new curricula and methodologies of work” (European Training Foundation, 1999) and to attract an interested audience amongst domestic policymakers and other VET practitioners, the projects also increasingly attempted directly to stimulate and support national policy. The “white papers” which projects assisted (and sometimes wrote) typically advocated decentralized management and tri-partite decision-making; integrating initial and continuing training; “shifting quality control over provision from input (curriculum contents, staff requirements) to output criteria (qualification standards),” and introducing new pathways and levels of training particularly between secondary and higher education (p.24).

While this basic package of reforms could still be recognized in the later stages of *Phare*, which frequently sought to extend the range of schools involved in the original pilots, VET projects also became more varied, including (ETF, 2003):

- mounting targeted re-training programmes for the unemployed, in response to countries’ increasing participation in the European Employment Strategy;
- stressing a regional dimension to VET and/or targeting disadvantaged groups, particularly the Roma minority, mirroring the approach of the EU Structural Funds;
- efforts to consolidate, regulate and institutionalize the newly emerged adult training sector, through the development of national agencies for this sector, accreditation schemes and associated legislation;
- more generally developing national VET strategy and policy, for example in developing national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms, reflecting the EU’s growing emphasis on these instruments as part of its *Copenhagen* process for VET.

## **The 'Curriculum Package' and its limitations**

A distinctive approach to the vocational curriculum was associated with *Phare* from its early days. This represented a particular approach to VET, and also influenced what was to be done in other components of projects, such as teacher training and dissemination. Parkes *et al.* (1998) contrasted this approach with what had gone before in the eastern countries:

A traditional understanding of teaching and learning in vocational education and training results in traditional forms of curricula with a closed system of instructional courses complemented by a systematic organisation of contents in subject form. This organisation of content fits a traditional teacher dominated process mostly described in a syllabus with learning goals, teaching media, and with timetables and tests ... Conversely 'modern' vocational education and training as exemplified in the curriculum philosophy of the *Phare* vocational training programmes is intended to facilitate the acquisition of useful individual competencies, knowledge and behaviour related to a society which is (at least notionally) integrated in its concepts of labour, technology and the market. Curricula with these goals focus on specific individual learning processes. (p.5)

A desire to promote flexibility and individualization (both contrasts to the communist system) gave rise to the promotion of modularization in many *Phare* projects from Estonia to Bulgaria. A desire to give more autonomy over the organization of teaching to schools, while at the same time promoting accountability and 'fit' with demands of the labour market, pointed towards the western practice of "... the establishment of national qualification standards, often based on occupational standards elaborated with the assistance of the social partners" (p.10). The 'traditional' separation of theory and practice within vocational curricula was replaced by a more holistic view of 'competence'. As we have seen earlier (page 52) many domestic commentators had identified an excessively didactic approach to teaching as unhelpful in fostering future adaptability, so the adoption of more student-centred methods involving problem solving and transversal 'key skills', held attractions to progressive educators in the East, as well as according with recent developments in some western countries.

However Parkes *et al.* remarked that this is a very particular interpretation of the curriculum:

A ... set of critical issues relate to the rather narrow curriculum conception that has been adopted in most countries within the framework of the Phare programmes. This has resulted in a focus on changing learning contents and introducing assessment of learning outcomes. This approach is very much 'in vogue' in some EU countries (though not uncontested). (p.31)

Moreover, the application of a particular recipe for modernization – in this case modularization – could be rather capricious, and be introduced without regard to its wider implications:

The Central and Eastern European country cases which have attempted to implement a modular approach have variable approaches, from no modules (Latvia, Slovenia) to a 1000 (Estonia) or some (the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovak Republic). The organisational, resourcing and institutional implications of such an approach are considerable. It is not clear why this approach has been advocated (or not) for Phare vocational training programmes in general or by specific advisers in particular. The organisational implications are barely grasped ... for example the complex relations between modularisation and a credit based or competence based approach. (p.29)

Although there was a good deal of commonality in approach, the application of the '*Phare* philosophy' in particular countries depended to a degree on the origin and predilections of the foreign experts. Apparently Slovakia had adopted "the SCOTVEC\* model of curriculum design" (p.61) whereas in Estonia "the Irish labour market skills training system" had held attractions (p.40). But Celtic models were not the only ones:

In Slovenia the introduction of several professions in a dual vocational education and training system was conducted with help from neighbouring countries. An exchange of curricula at the institutional level was organised. But a dual system also needs to include workshop practice and experience in companies. Companies in Slovenia are under reconstruction and not yet interested in vocational training. Without a strong commitment from local and regional companies (which is difficult in the near future) the link with labour processes is not possible. (p.15)

What is more, different donors promoted different concepts resulting, in Romania, in a need to reach agreement between them and their client ministries:

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\* SCOTVEC was at the time the authority responsible for the regulation and development of vocational qualifications in Scotland. It also had a department concerned with consultancy aid to foreign countries. Following merger with its general education counterpart it became the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

The definitions of 'standards' of competence have been agreed between the World Bank (Ministry of Labour) and the Phare vocational training (Ministry of Education) projects. (p.16)

With a number of different curriculum approaches vying with established models and being open to interpretation by different sets of foreign experts (Nielsen, 2004) it is not surprising that, rather than replace the old methods, the new ones tended to run in parallel, acting as an overlay to them. Uncertainty about concepts was widespread and resonated even a decade after the *Phare* interventions:

Traditionally, the description of “educational goals” was essential for curricular documents..... Nevertheless, despite this, content based programming dominated within curriculum design. A “competence-based” paradigm become dominant in the early 2000s mixing up with a traditional approach, gradually complicated with a European ‘learning outcomes discourse’. (Refernet Slovakia, 2011, p.82)

Parkes *et al.* questioned the wisdom of applying a particular curriculum model to different countries, regardless of circumstances:

The principal characteristic of the Phare supported curriculum reforms ... has been the attempt to initiate a systemic reform of the whole system through the introduction of a particular curriculum model .... The model was imported from EU countries and, though ideologically attractive, paid little attention to the specific transition conditions of each individual country. (p.30)

This manifestation of particular models and their pitfalls might be put down to initial enthusiasm on the part of certain international experts, but it is plain from a further publication eight years later involving two of the original authors (Parkes and Nielsen, 2006), that the approach had proved durable, and was still being applied in south east Europe. The authors had become clearer about its origins:

The specific curriculum package (in terms of such elements as curriculum values, modular organisation and competence based approach) derives more from the English-speaking approach than from the French or particularly German or Scandinavian organisation of VET. Hence in the chosen countries there is tension everywhere between the EU-funded projects and the GTZ\* approach. In short, there is a

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\* GTZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*) is a German government-owned company dedicated to technical co-operation in partner countries.

danger of an EU VET model which does not reflect the diversity of even member state practice. (p.14)

Again, models from different countries are imported, but within a more restricted range:

...a more or less common reform or curriculum development model has been applied in each (Scottish in the case of Bulgaria and Serbia; English in the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Irish in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina – all with a broadly similar approach). (p.14)

It must be noted, despite the evident scepticism shown here, that many evaluators at the time praised this type of *Phare* model, including one of Parkes's co-authors:

The Phare programme has made a remarkable and impressive contribution to the modernisation and decentralisation of Romanian VET curriculum development in terms of formulation and dissemination of curriculum policy, teaching and learning philosophy and methodology. (Nielsen and Steen Hansen, 1999, p.6)

There is scope, no doubt, for much debate about the appropriateness of the '*Phare* curriculum model'. However, there were other reasons why improving VET through aid proved difficult.

Spreading the approach outside the pilot schools could certainly not be taken for granted. As the early ETF review makes clear the pilot schools, although much energized by their selection, "were allowed ... to operate on an 'experimental basis' without any major commitment by national policymakers to use results and integrate them into mainstream developments" (ETF, 2001, p.29). Indeed, governments could stand back from these innovations, as in the Czech Republic:

... the lack of receptiveness, interest and acknowledgement of results by the [Ministry of Education] prevented mainstreaming the outputs to national level. In addition the programme arrangement did not involve third parties from the policy level, e.g. the Ministry of Labour, resulting in the lack of linkage to labour-market restructuring and adult training. (Baumgartl, Strietska-Ilina and Schaumberger, 2004, p.170)

What is more, the production of 'concept papers' and 'white papers' by no means guaranteed that systemic reform at the policy level would be followed through into legislation, or even be accepted by national policymakers and legislatures, as in Slovakia:

A key element in the terms of reference.. was the preparation of a national strategy. However such a strategy was never developed as there was no direct involvement of main policy-makers in the programme. Social partners have been reluctant to participate in a project which the [Ministry of Education] itself did not fully recognise. (p.172)

Moreover, the sheer scale of rolling out complex curriculum development and teacher training across the whole system was often too daunting for the country concerned to contemplate. Smith (2001) describes how a successful exercise in training Bulgarian teachers to adopt new approaches in a *Phare* project failed to be replicated across the system simply because the logistics were too daunting for the national authorities. In a number of countries, the pilot schools, remained 'stranded', neither being replicated in the mainstream system, nor (no doubt in fear of criticism from Brussels) being wound up as inappropriate.

Masson (2003) also points to problems with the complexity of, and frequent changes to, the *Phare* guidelines, to the number of parallel projects which were often running at the same time with different ministries or agencies involved in each, and to lack of capacity – particularly in the regions – to play a full part in the programmes.

However, these difficulties should not lead one to dismiss the impact of the aid programme. Materially, much badly needed equipment, modern textbooks, and refurbishments of appallingly deteriorated school buildings were provided through *Phare*. Teacher-training was undoubtedly welcomed, as in many places this had fallen into disrepair; exposure to foreign practices through study visits stimulated interest and, in some cases, continued contacts. At the policy level, in many countries *Phare* focussed attention on VET reform; indeed in places it was the only source of funding for reform at all (Laužackas and Danilevičius, 2006). Certain 'landmark' projects left a lasting impact, for example VETERST in Bulgaria "...had a positive reputation. The programme has supported continuing reform in a difficult and volatile environment" (Baumgartl, Strietska-Ilina and Schaumberger, 2004, p.174). Slovenia's MOCCA programme, according to Masson:

gives an interesting example of a project in situation of failure at its end because of a lack of agreement among national stakeholders on the reforms proposed, and a final surprising rescue: The ex-post evaluation discovered that the project had created a community of stakeholders who kept promoting



the reforms and who eventually unblocked the policy-making process, enabling the implementation of the proposed reforms outside the scope of the *Phare* intervention. (p.31)

and in Lithuania the formation, in a *Phare* project, of a set of 'expert practitioners' produced a cadre of 'champions' within the system who would be influential in subsequent reform movements (European Training Foundation, 2001).

### **A consistent policy?**

In retrospect one can see a set of conflicting principles within the support programme. The EU took different stances on each at different times. In the first place there was a dilemma as to whether to adopt 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' strategies. The 'pilot school' approaches, designed to demonstrate western models in practice, clearly had problems in making a wider impact in the countries concerned. These limitations prompted the EU to inject more policy advice into projects, stimulating 'white' and 'green' papers on national policy, and sometimes helping to draft legislation. There were of course problems with this approach too, as domestic policymakers and publics questioned why internal policies were subject to external intervention.

We can also detect some shifts between approaches which were primarily directed at employment, with VET seen as a vehicle for dealing with problems of displacement through re-training, as contrasted with more directly education-related projects which treated VET as part of a wider programme of educational modernization. The emphasis between employment and education changed over time, in favour of the former for a time and then back again. This had implications both for the style of project (for example, youth versus adult training) and for the sponsoring ministries involved, leading to internal tensions as the 'European' spotlight of funds and favour swung to and fro.

A constant tension was whether projects should be principally related to the EU agenda – whether in terms of the state of play of the accession negotiations in the middle phase of *Phare*, or of the *Copenhagen* and *Lisbon* agendas in the later stages – or whether projects should mainly be designed as a response to particular circumstances of particular countries.

It was not always clear to many of those involved in projects whether they were working on behalf of the 'beneficiary' country, or of the 'donor' EU.

There was a balance to be struck between deploying foreign experts and domestic 'local' consultants. Relying largely on the former ran the risk of importing inappropriate 'solutions' or of the pursuit of personal hobby horses, but external experts did bring injections of new thinking and objectivity. 'Local experts', on the other hand could carry on the initiatives after the project had finished; however putting development in the hands of people who might be overly identified with particular domestic interests could prejudice initiatives.

There were changes of policy about how best to deploy foreign expertise; whether through unattached individuals treating the countries as their 'clients' or through designating institutions in selected member states through the 'twinning' arrangements. While the former gave the EU authorities and the countries concerned more control, the latter type of arrangement, arguably, might give rise to more authentic insights about foreign practice and enable longer term relationships to be formed.

Again, should projects focus on building up VET 'infrastructure', such as capacity-building in ministries and education institutions, and promoting the involvement of 'social partners' as well as investing in buildings and equipment, or should they rather attempt directly to influence teaching and learning by developing new approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy? The former was, of course, a necessary condition of future progress, but it was hard to influence and easy to misjudge the points of intervention and the readiness of participants to engage. The latter gave more satisfying instant results and – in the right circumstances – could inject vision amongst practitioners who knew that the old ways were not working; however it could also be ephemeral.

The story of *Phare* in VET is about the EU and its agencies navigating a course through these conundrums, paying attention, too, to the changing emphases of EU policy on VET as it unfurled over the accession period. At the end of the day, though, a great deal depended on the attitude and capacity of the recipient government – whether it knew what it wanted and whether it was prepared to negotiate about, prepare for, and subsequently commit to the kind of change offered in *Phare*:

Reform efforts were especially successful in those countries where the national, regional and local levels had jointly worked to common targets in a complementary top-down and bottom-up approach. Definition of these targets needs major stakeholder involvement at all political levels, from the macro to the micro level, making the whole reform process more transparent. (Baumgartl, Strietska-Illina and Schaumberger, 2004, p.187)

## **EU integration**

In terms of EU integration theory, therefore, the *Phare* experience presents a complex picture. Without consent and – more than that – active interest at governmental level, interventions would be unlikely to bear fruit, as inter-governmentalists would predict. The widespread approach, in projects, of exposing one country to the experts and practices of others would also point to the importance of country-to-country interactions.

Social constructivists, on the other hand, would point to the significance of exposure to foreign practice at the personal level, which was a regular feature in the many projects which incorporated study visits for policymakers and practitioners. Constructivists might perhaps also claim that there was some kind of ‘crucible effect’ in the way that a distinctive curriculum model emerged through the formation of an ‘epistemic community’ of experts brought together by *Phare*, though they might find it more difficult to explain why the model did not take root more often, given its evident appeal to many practitioners who were involved and the fact that it was identified as a distinctively ‘modern’ and ‘European’ approach.

Neo-functionalists would also point to this distinctive curriculum model, but claim rather that it was formed through increments and default, representing an acceptable, rational choice for the technocrats concerned; EU officials must have been wary about adopting the VET model of any particular established member state, and so there must have been attractions in a such a new and relatively rootless approach, which arguably represented something of an amalgam of elements from different western VET traditions. Neo-functionalists would also point to the way that EU policies to encourage countries to conform to the European Employment Strategy ‘spilled over’ into the support programmes for VET.

An interpretation based on political economy might want to focus on the specialized set of businesses which grew up to respond to, and perhaps influence, the tendering procedures around *Phare* and to claim that the particular mixture of support was governed by what such firms found it profitable to provide. They might also point to the involvement of certain western governments in promoting their VET systems through their sponsorship of tendering organizations (eg. the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the British Council or the German GTZ). However purely economic explanations based would have difficulty in accounting for the apparent lack of involvement of major western companies in the projects and the tendency of projects to focus on the public rather than the private sector of VET.

## CHAPTER TEN

### BEDSIDE MANNERS: Perspectives of Those Involved

#### Introduction

We have learned much about the EU's approach to VET in the East, and garnered some reactions to it through formal evaluations and the published comments of participants or observers. But this leaves a number of unanswered questions and gives little impression of the attitudes of participants at the time, of the difficulties they encountered and of the successes they considered they had achieved.

To fill in some texture on these matters and to probe a little further into some of the more interesting questions, I conducted nine interviews with a view to exploring particular issues. This chapter reports on those interviews. The issues investigated were:

- How were projects run in practice?
- What were the attitudes of those involved in development projects and what difficulties did they encounter?
- To what extent were projects tailored to the needs of individual countries, and how was this achieved?
- What was the experience of the various other types of intervention (the pressures during accession negotiations, the 'open method of co-ordination' and the increasing participation of policymakers and practitioners in EU-wide networks)?
- What was the experience of being a 'foreign expert' and what were the reactions of host countries to explicit foreign influence?
- Why did the rather distinctive 'reform package' described in the last chapter take the form that it did?

As explained in Chapter Two (page 41) I conducted interviews with a range of people who had witnessed the interaction between the EU and eastern European countries on VET matters. All had been involved with the VET support projects in one way or another, though many had also taken part in

other aspects of EU activities. The individuals, with the abbreviations used in the extracts that follow, were:

Person	Position
POL Ro	Former policymaker in Romania
ETF Dk	Senior official at ETF who had previously worked in DG Enlargement (Danish)
ETF NI	Country manager at ETF (Dutch)
ETF Fr	Senior official at ETF (French)
LEX Se	'Local expert' in Serbian projects, previously an official in the Ministry of Education
TL UK	Team leader of EU funded projects in Serbia and Romania (British)
CON UK	Consultant on projects, who has experience of drawing up terms of reference (British)
CON Hu	Consultant on projects, including Croatia and Romania, specializing in higher education and qualifications (Hungarian)
CON Bg	Consultant on projects, including Croatia, specializing in education IT systems (Bulgarian)

### **Running *Phare* projects**

Most of the participants had been personally involved in *Phare* projects. I was interested to know what they thought of the way the projects operated.

The first stage, involved drawing up the terms of reference (ToR). These specified the tasks that a project should carry out, over what timescale, and what kind of expertise was to be deployed. It was against these terms of reference that competing contractors bid and they formed the basis for the evaluation of the proposals. CON UK was very experienced in the art of specifying terms of reference, and described the niceties of involving the relevant authorities within the country when doing so:

Now, the problem is drafting these terms of reference, because in Bosnia, as you know, it's a very complex structure. You've got the national government, you've got the federal government, you've got two 'Entities', one the Republic of Srpska, and you've got a free city called Brčko ... No use me writing terms of reference where one or two of the Entities won't go along with it... I wrote the terms of reference, but I went back three times with ...another Irish expert, to negotiate the fine details with the Entities; only, only to make them feel part of the process, and to bring them on board. We had to eliminate the opposition.

Sometimes he found problems in matching the required work to the available budget, and this could cause problems later if tendering companies took on projects that had unrealistic goals:

CON UK I also did the decentralization of the Croatian employment service. And I was short [of money] there, you see. You obviously have to explain and justify why you're doing it, but if you're short, you're short. Now what you shouldn't do is try and bend it... but I know consultants do this. If they're given €1m, they'll write the terms of reference and try and fit the activities into it, and that often means that people can't do the job...

JW I've sometimes written bids and said "Look, this is crazy, you can't do that, we'll just have to say we can't do it." ... But I've been guided by the firm that's going to bid. "No, we just have to do it." So there's some kind of conspiracy or accidental connivance on an unrealistic proposition.

CON UK Now, this is a decision for a company. Often I will write the bids for a company, and then I'll say to them "Look, this has not been properly costed – you can't do it." ... and there's not much profit in this for you..." In Albania there was a very badly drafted ToR. It was for total reform of the civil service. Badly drafted, incorrectly costed. The company went along with it. Their response to the ToR was often just a straight lift from the terms of reference. And they went along with it. A badly written ToR and a badly written response. And you end up with trying to do something that's impossible, right? This is what happened in Albania.

Writing a project proposal on the part of a tendering organization, which CON UK had also done, developed into a fine art, with the result that after a time it counted for less than it used to (with more emphasis on the experts offered in a tender):

CON UK Well, you know way the projects are assessed, don't you? That there's an element for methodology. Now that used to be 70 or 80 per cent. It's now down to about 30 or 40. And the reason for that is that a lot of...I write them now, I've got a template that normally guarantees me very close to the top marks anyway. And lots of companies [can do that]...

JW They're written by the same person probably?

CON UK Yes... I mean I could give you an absolute guarantee I could get you 28 out of 30 for the methodology.

However, there was inevitably a considerable gap between the identification of a need in a beneficiary country and the deployment of resources to address it through a project:

TL UK ...you have to have the Terms of Reference agreed by the time the procurement notice is published so therefore you're talking about typically you know six, eight months before the start of the project. It should be less than that, but it is six-eight months and bearing in mind that the process of developing the TORs will have taken... and that the TORs themselves come from the project fiche which has been developed a long time ahead of that, so if you just take a gross part of the project such as, you know, support of NQF development, that idea is put into the system a very, very long time ago ...

Bearing the risk of out-datedness in mind, the ability to adapt the project once it had actually started could be important. However getting a later change agreed by the relevant authorities was not necessarily straightforward:

CON Hu [If the project team] are really aware of what the country needs, they do a good job during the inception phase, they can make a lot of changes. But then from the other side ....the beneficiary country; if the persons with whom you discuss during the inception phase, if they are flexible and they really want the change, if they really want to use the project money efficiently ... in this case they will be flexible enough to accept for the changes .... But in some other countries, you don't have this flexibility at all, so if someone has signed, they want word by word, exactly the same job [as in the terms of reference], independently of what has happened in the meantime in the country.

There were frustrations with the project process from the beneficiary country's perspective, too. For example, each project tended to have its own structure for involving the local communities it worked with:

POL Ro Any single project proposed its own institutions and it was not very much co-ordination and therefore – not only in Romania, but also other assisted countries – finalized by having a mushroom of committees ... For example in the case of education and employment, the county agencies for employment they were deciding to have an advisory board... due to the fact that education has been assisted through a project, and employment through another project, we ended by having two different committees. And nowadays it is very difficult to [disband] them ... No: committees, committees, steering committees.

The 'local experts' from the beneficiary country who were frequently appointed to supplement the 'international experts' played a very important role in projects, acting as a link with the stakeholders in the country. After the project they might well go on to be influential in their own right, at home or abroad:



TL UK As far as local experts go, they have an enormous role to play in sustainability of project interventions, and actually capacity building. ...Local experts are volunteers, local experts actually want to get into a project, and once they're in a project they work in close quarters with us, they take direction from us ... they tend to get recycled anyway, you know an expert becomes a Ministry consultant, becomes an advisor, becomes this, goes back to consultancy as an international expert. It's a fairly mobile kind of environment that they're in... and actually good local experts, you know, open all the doors for you and all the rest of it... And local experts are the cream anyway, and they're the urban educated, English speaking elite of the country.

However their appointment to a project could be less than straightforward, with various interests promoting particular candidates:

TL UK What will happen, and this is not just a one-off, what tends to happen ... is that before you win a project people will be dropping names, and the people who will be dropping names could be people in the Ministry, because these people were on the previous project and they wanted to adopt them. It can be your own consulting company who've just finished a project and want to do someone a favour, it can be – heaven forbid and shouldn't be, but can be – the contracting authority [usually the EU delegation] itself who has slipped you a CV and say, "Look, you might be interested in this person."

JW But by and large that's reasonably helpful is it?

TL UK It depends on the way in which it's done. I think that if a representative of the contracting authority gives you a CV and suggests that you might want to take this person on, and then... you're in a difficult position in proposing someone else for that position. But once you start letting other people take decisions for you, it's a slippery slope... the system of favours that builds up, people expect this.

Not everyone, though, preferred the younger urbanites favoured by our Team Leader. There was something to be said for the generation that had grown up under communism:

CON Hu In Bulgaria also I worked with very good local experts and the same was in Georgia. In Georgia I had really excellent local experts, very highly qualified. But, you know, my age so they had grown up in the Soviet era [laughs], they were open-minded, well-educated, so it's much more different than the new generation. The new generation is only money. Money and new clothes and 'handys'\*.

JW Everywhere, or just Georgia?

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\* Mobile 'phones.

CON Hu Oh, almost everywhere.

JW It's the same at home...

CON Hu [Laughs]. Yes, the same in Hungary, I know!

### **Attitudes and keys to success**

From the point of view of the EU and project members, the attitude of policymakers in the country was key to ensuring that a project was appropriate and successful. However positive and active co-operation of the authorities could by no means always be counted upon, as described by two members of the ETF:

ETF Fr My understanding was that, at that time, it was not possible to trust very much the policymakers who were the same as before – they didn't change a lot, particularly in the permanent Ministries which were not the most important in the socialist economy.

ETF Dk So one of the big puzzles for me is how it has been possible to continue for so long in many countries and have so relatively weak capacity in the Ministries to actually define projects according to whatever criteria Brussels wanted.

Our Hungarian consultant also instanced some out-dated bureaucratic habits, but also a rather cynical attitude to the motivation of the EU:

CON Hu In countries... [which] has a staff which are not trained enough how to run an EU project, especially those persons who lived in the former system when everything was dictated by a central office, the Ministry or the Party or whatever – those will never change. Those will stick to the original contract, they will never understand that this project is... to help the country to make some changes... Some friends of mine who are in the same business, they told me that in some countries they consider the project money nothing but peanuts for the EU and used only for PR purposes. So therefore they really don't mind what you do in the project... they consider it just as publicity for the European Union.

If hostility, or lack of interest, on the part of the authorities applied to a whole strand of reform, then problems could become endemic and subvert a range of development activities, even where – on paper – they had governmental backing:

CON UK More often the norm is that there is tacit support for a project. There is a group of consultants who will come in and who will write a sector strategy. Normally with, sort of,

*en passant* acceptance by the minister and his colleagues. And that document is not used. It's not enforced, and it remains in somebody's drawer. Now, out of that often is a series of projects, and those projects by and large don't work. They don't work. And the reason that they don't work is that really there is no enthusiasm for them. They're playing along with the process, rather than engaging in it.

One ETF interviewee considered that in fact a 'clean slate' in terms of government could result in a more active engagement with reform:

ETF NI You see also interesting there were a number of countries that became independent; they were not existing before. So, in the former Soviet Union, all the Baltic states, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, so we're talking about quite a lot of countries that suddenly had to develop a policy.. They had to set up the institutions, and the methodological institutions they were not existing in those countries...But in those countries, [for example] Estonia, Slovenia you see the strongest reform because actually they had the opportunity that they could start from a clean slate. "We want to do it *our way*".

Having reform-minded individuals in positions which could influence policies was clearly vital. One interviewee at the ETF described what was needed in more detail, and touched on the delicacies of an external agent wanting to influence appointments in another country:

ETF NI You first have to probably reinforce the central level.

JW So this is capacity building? ... getting in people who wish to make reforms into more significant positions. This sounds a good process...

ETF NI Yes, it is a good process. If you had some good people, for instance there were some good people in Romania, then it works...So you need a few people who are there, steady and who are ready to...I think they must not be at the political level. So someone like [names junior minister in Serbia], she is going to disappear if the government will change, so you need really the level below [to be] strong. That needs to be there and you need somehow the strong people...

JW ... did you have conversations about appointments with these countries?

ETF NI No. It was not my [role]. And I don't think it's right. You don't know...

JW But you said you were able to influence the building of capacity in the way you describe, but I'm not, I don't understand...

ETF NI Well, it was more a discussion, putting ideas in their heads. That's it – discussing... But you can't do much

about appointments ... It's empowering the people who are there – rather than more about increasing resources. That's what DG Employment did. They could do that. That was part of their [method]. ... They would pressure for that, because they were much more about "Who's responsible for that; how many people do you have in place, *etc. etc.*"

However according to our experienced Team Leader, at working level within projects where day-to-day co-operation was what mattered, personal chemistry was an essential component:

TL UK Everything is down to individuals. Everything is down to individuals ... It really does make a difference. You know I go into meetings in Serbia with certain men and I walk in – "Hello, hello" and you put your hand on someone's shoulder ....It's all a question of playing games, you know it depends who *cares* the most... to get something done.

Personal relations and the motivations of the parties was not all. Problems with language, and misunderstanding about important concepts, could be a significant barrier. One ETF official pointed out that some fundamental ideas about VET – accepted in the West – could not necessarily be taken for granted in the East:

ETF Fr When we speak about the VET system in the EU, in our countries, it's something which is very broad – a lot of sub-systems, involving private, public, not only secondary education, but continuing training also is very much developed. In the candidate countries the definition of VET is often very much limited to secondary public professionalization. ... it was very striking to see that countries which had developed strategies for VET, and independently a strategy for adult education, ... without understanding that adult training is much more than adult educations. ... there is also some ambiguities – they just use the terms without understanding really what is behind them. Lifelong learning – a lifelong learning strategy – in the candidate countries people think that lifelong learning is just for adults. There is a difference between VET and lifelong learning. ... we don't pay enough attention to the difference between wordings ...

Within beneficiary countries, a critical aspect was having a coherent concept of what kind of development to undertake in the field of VET, and – importantly – achieving internal consensus about this. In Romania this took some time as our policymaker explained:

POL Ro In fact in the education sector we find it as being useful to have a human resource strategy done by already '98 or '99; so here it is a plus for the Minister at the time, he was a very visionary person and he said if we are going to

have all this reform going on with different support from abroad, we have to have our vision in our hand. And so the first strategy in human resource development has been done in '98 and published in '99 [but]...the other institutions, economic sectors they were not ready, in fact, to join us. How to fit the human resource development with the whole picture of the development of the country it was not achievable until 2002.

In Serbia, by contrast, the Ministry of Education reached a firm view that VET reform was needed immediately after the fall of Milosević. Without any prompting by the EU it rapidly took the initiative in building an agenda for change, drawing on practice in other countries:

LEX Se ... the Ministry ... formed a group which could be this vehicle for the reform. And this reform group for VET prepared many things, it was very involved in different communications, meetings, discussions with the EU experts, other country experts, officials, everything. And this group for the reform of VET was this flagship body which facilitated discussion between the system, the Ministry and the EU countries or EU Commission. And from this group arose many sub-groups for different areas, for different topics in VET reform.

However in Serbia, as in some other countries, internal opposition soon manifested itself. Having gained positions in EU-funded 'CARDS'<sup>\*</sup> projects which they had welcomed as promoting VET reform, the reformers then found themselves on the back foot:

LEX Se We had many enemies. CARDS had many enemies and in the time of 2004, 2005 and 2006, many pressures to close or change this approach from the CARDS, especially the modular approach, competences and ... people couldn't use the term of competences or something like that... Especially it was difficult because the people in the Institute for the Development of Education, they didn't have any communication with CARDS. They made a big restriction on the people employed in the Institute [from] cooperating with CARDS.

JW But why did they do this, do you think?

LEX Se Because they didn't accept this approach, new approach, new model of approach, new relation between theoretical and practical...

JW But again, why didn't they accept this new approach?

LEX Se Because they didn't understand, firstly. ... And they were scared that this new curriculum orientation would

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<sup>\*</sup> The equivalent of *Phare* in the western Balkans.

change the traditional position of the teachers of some subjects or some disciplines...

Before she became an international expert, the Bulgarian consultant had worked in VET institutions in that country which EU projects had sought to influence. She described how the ministries of education and employment had been cautious about being too closely involved in EU-sponsored reform initiatives, despite considerable enthusiasm on the part of the educational institutions:

CON Bg In Bulgaria the project teams were working much more independently... the Ministries were not very much involved in development of the projects, in the outputs. They were waiting for the projects to develop the outputs, and then they were analyzing and saying, "OK, this is fine for us, and this one we are using part of it, and this one is good idea, but actually it's not applicable."

JW And this function of the Ministry and the authorities of sort of standing back, do you think it was deliberate, or was it because they were too busy... Or was it just that they didn't understand ...

CON Bg Basically they were too busy. Too busy. Maybe part of the planning, but none of the institutions in Bulgaria actually had a department, or whatever, that is taking care of this kind of project, technical assistance or things like that. And people really did not have time to devote a lot to this project development...

JW And the attitude, not of the policymakers, but of the schools, to the projects when they were involved, was this generally...

CON Bg Generally the schools were very happy to have any kind of project. ... They were very active. They were happy they are invited. Especially for the vocational education and training projects, different projects operated on school level, but they all said that they are very satisfied with what happens with the projects.

JW And was there any disappointment on the part of the schools that the Ministry was not so much involved?

CON Bg I think that they worked on different levels, and this was not really felt by the schools.

Apart from official support there were other features which, in the opinion of practitioners, were key to success. The members of the teams assembled for a project usually came from different countries, and very often the first time they met each other was on arrival in the beneficiary country. In such cases it could not be taken for granted that there would be a common

understanding, either within the team, or between them and the beneficiary country, as to what exactly the expectations were:

CON Hu ... the team is very important, the key experts ... Can they work together or not? Whether everybody understands in the same way the project, that's very important because there are a lot of problems that people have totally different perceptions of what should be done in the project... And then a lot of things depends on whether the country where you do, or the beneficiary on whom you do the technical assistance, whether they have the necessary capacity first to understand what is the project [about] because sometimes even the beneficiary does not understand what the project is about.

A project needed also to be seen as relevant within the beneficiary country, and to come at the right time so that it meshed in with other developments. Again this could not be taken for granted:

CON Bg For me, first of all this is the perspective of the project. Is the project relevant to what the country really needs? Because if the project is not relevant for the moment, it makes the implementation very difficult and ...sometimes there is a very big gap between the time the project is planned... and the project is implemented. If this gap is very big, the project might be later, so if something was really urgent it is not waiting for the project. So the time may be the second key factor. The right project at the right time.

For the Team Leader the ability of the project team to communicate with people in the country was what made a real difference between engagement and being sidelined as an ineffective repository of technical expertise:

TL UK ...there's nothing terribly original in VET, there's no kind of high concepts to be wrestled with in VET. And there are books and there is the internet, so sources of information are there. You know, we have limited scope for action. But it's getting stuff *across*... in terms of getting stuff across, and that's what counts...

As we have seen (page 178) projects typically consisted of a range of different components. I was interested to learn which of these the experienced practitioners considered to have the most impact:

JW ...there are various elements of a project – the policy advice, the buildings you've commented on, the equipment, staff training, curriculum work, study visits again you've mentioned. Would you single any of those out as having a particularly good impact?

TL UK Maybe it's my background, my own personal background. Training done well, followed then by study visits

done well. But training done badly, study visits done badly take you backwards. Then the curriculum, the paperwork – because in the end paperwork is literally that. Someone has to interpret it ... If people haven't been trained – haven't got the will to implement it – then it won't happen....

There was a difference of opinion amongst interviewees about the impact of the policy advice offered as part of projects. From the point of view of the Hungarian consultant this was a very effective way of promoting reform at minimal cost:

CON Hu ...if the project is very small, in this case, it's better ... the most useful thing is the technical assistance, like policy advice or writing strategies – helping the beneficiary how to write programmes or strategies.

The Serbian local expert, who was personally committed to reform within VET, stressed the role of projects acting as a lobbying instrument for policy change, including writing policy documents for adoption by the government:

LEX Se CARDS had a big group of experts...at that time it was good because this group of experts prepared all the strategy documents. Any other EU project didn't develop this number of strategic documents which were submitted [to] the government, to the Ministry.

JW So this was the "Green Paper", the "White Paper"?

LEX Se Yes, because from this strategic documents developed other national documents. And it was very good. The second CARDS started very good, and covered exactly the whole reform of VET.... All in the same package. In a box, how you say...And it was good that CARDS had this mechanism including experts and team leaders pushing. And being very open and pushed the Ministry and CARDS had this energy [for] change.

However one ETF interlocutor admitted that, to begin with at least, policy development as part of projects had been rather unsophisticated:

ETF NI ..the projects could not anymore stand alone. They needed strategies and policies. Those policies, the first ones, that were developed, they weren't very good. They were sort of cut and paste. So then it took some time before they were ... discussed with all stakeholders and the Ministries. So the first ones they were just two or three people who were given the time. Because they needed to produce those, and they didn't have the time and they didn't know how to organize the process. So that was a bit dangerous.



and another ETF interviewee pointed to the possibility of project consultants producing ready-made policies with little support within the beneficiary country:

ETF Dk There is much, much more emphasis now on policy. So now whatever is done is always trying to be combined with policy development. Probably also at times to an excess. ... [it's] sometimes a condition in order to get the pilot projects or support for individual schools or teaching training or curriculum development, or standards developed. My own feeling is at times there has been too much emphasis on policy and also at times in not very stable situations. Also there were expectations that you, as a consultant, would write a policy for a country. And sometimes they were interested and involved; in other times they directly would have expected the consultant to deliver a report ... but then we have moved more towards policy learning, trying to make sure that the country itself was fully involved in the drafting, but at the end of the day if the consultant has in his terms of reference that he must [write a policy]... if it doesn't work in a collaborative way, eventually they will do it themselves.

A further typical component of projects were the 'study tours', where groups of staff from a beneficiary country's schools went to other EU countries to see conditions and practice at first hand. Many of the interviewees though these were particularly valuable, for example the consultant from Bulgaria:

CON Bg Also I think that all the study visits during the projects and all the exchange between people from different countries were very useful, nevertheless what the final result of the project is. Because they also work on the level of capacity building. People can see more ideas, they can see more things, and they can better decide what they want, what they don't want, what they like, what they don't like.

Even our hard-bitten Team Leader acknowledged the power of first-hand experience to change perceptions about what is possible:

...well-organized study visits can be very useful because in the end it's irresistible to wander round an Austrian school and see that the kids are in class on time, not smashing the place up, and that employers are on their knees in front of 16-year olds begging them to consider working for them when they finish. Once you get to that stage, then people give in...

The Danish interviewee at the ETF had worked in the Baltic States earlier and pointed to the possibility of serendipitous results from projects well after the event. In Lithuania an ostensibly unsuccessful project had nevertheless brought key people together in a common experience:

ETF Dk [The head of the VET department in Lithuania] said several times to me that there is a lot of critical evaluation reports of the first project ... which was not particularly positive. However had they not had that project they would never had had a group of people with whom they could actually discuss the modern system that they wanted to implement ...if they only had people who basically knew the Soviet system, how could they even imagine anything else, so for him in the reality the first programme – even if he ended up having 8 schools at the wrong levels, so secondary VET schools were changed to post-secondary VET and university because they didn't understand the names in Lithuania – ...the fact that they really got a group of people who could be used by themselves as a resource, [with views on] where should they go.

JW And they kept this as a network?

ETF Dk They used for quite a long time as a network and also many of these people have developed in the system, and came into positions... There was a base for them to work with. Heavily criticized as a pilot project approach, but actually acted with themselves as a useful staff development tool.

However, as our local expert from Serbia explained, getting grass-root champions was not sufficient for success if there were difficulties at the policy level. Pilots could remain just that:

LEX Se ... it was visible at the last conference, last week that our Directors [Principals] in some pilot schools they have now a good set of skills, they have good energy and they are strategic thinkers about their schools. This is mobilization.

JW So they are champions now – they can be a model to others...

LEX Se Yes, this is something that is a direct effect... people in the schools were [understanding] what are competences, what is meaning the modular approach, how is going piloting, what are results. ...A less good effect is that piloting is very long and schools didn't have the power to push the Ministry ... This is something which schools didn't recognize themselves as pushing agents, push the Ministry more, be more...

JW So they're sort of locked in the pilots.

LEX Se Yes, locked in the piloting...This is not good and this is a bad effect in the long-term of piloting.

As seen from the point of view of advocates of reform within a country, projects could act helpfully as a mark of commitment from the EU for policies which some might otherwise write off as mere rhetoric:

CON Bg I should say that these technical assistance projects, actually are very important for the countries, from my point of view. Because countries can see that the European Union actually has some instruments for implementing the policies.

But the experienced Team Leader pointed out that some projects which did not catch the mood within the country could sink without trace in terms of impact because of an excessively mechanical approach:

TL UK I think the worst kind of projects are those that take the ToR literally and verbatim. You know, a tick against this: 300 hours... there are projects which are so bad that you'll have never heard of them, because they have no impact whatsoever...And you have projects which come and go for which I've not seen one piece of paper, not one report in this Ministry. Huge, hundreds of thousands of Euro projects, which actually achieve nothing.

Our Hungarian consultant reflected that, in his country, there had been much waste because the basic design of many projects did not lend itself to sustainability:

CON Hu Actually in Hungary ... the problem was always related to the impact. You know when you make the reforms, when you start the reforms, there is a going down phase, and then when the project ends and the monitoring comes, then the development starts. But that's usually two or three years, and the projects are one and a half, or even one year projects. In those cases, if you speak with most of the Hungarian beneficiaries they will say that the money was thrown into the Danube, in the meaning that, thrown out of the window. It was wasted because they could not have the effect they really wanted.

JW Because they wanted longer?

CON Hu They were very short – the period was very short. So 80 per cent of their time was spent on administration and not on the implementation of the project.

### **Tailoring to a country's needs**

I was especially interested to find out the extent to which interventions were based on a diagnosis of a country's individual needs, and how this was achieved. As the Romanian policymaker explained, it was not the case that countries necessarily had a cogent account of their needs to begin with, but rather felt they needed to look abroad for the direction in which they might travel:

JW ... the diagnosis of what you needed to do was that made by the [donors] or did you already by that time have firm ideas?

POL Ro No firm ideas because just the guided process by the different foreign interlocutors and when the process started in '92 it was for example decided that a group of decision makers in the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour to go for visits in member states for finding out what is going on in the respective sectors ... And this was the basis for the Romanian government to get the first financial assistance from the Commission for a *Phare* project addressing VET, and a World Bank project addressing continuous vocational education and training... The weakness of this process, from my point of view, is the ownership of the process is such because the moment that the feasibility studies have been discussed with the key players in the country, I'm not very sure that Romania was already in a position to have a vision about the position of VET. So it was it was, let's say, driven from outside rather than from inside, so we were not in the position of having a shared vision and with the vision in our hands to start the negotiation. We were very much inspired from abroad.

Evidently feeling that they could not rely on countries specifying their own requirements, the Commission took a hand quite early in deciding what was needed:

ETF Dk Many countries, and partly still, have chosen equipment if they have been able to get away with it. What happened in the early days of course was that the EU sent out a consultant to prepare a programme. .... At times more in co-operation and with actual agreement of the country itself about what the priorities should be, but very much driven by the Commission and the consultants they introduced, or the ETF later.

JW Just say, do you think that the countries resented that control, or were they quite pleased to have some...

ETF Dk A mixture, a mixture. They came to realize that it probably made sense, some of things that were suggested, and it was not only about buying equipment. ....It's a strange situation because it's not that the countries were saying "Let us prepare the [terms of reference]"

And later on, as an agenda for accession began to build up, particularly in the area of employment policies, the projects became more explicitly driven by EU:

ETF NI *Phare* around 97-98 became accession driven. Before ...we discovered the idea of accession, it was very much trying to deal with the problems that were in the country. Although people didn't know about how to deal with

them. Transition itself has been a situation that has been difficult to deal with...

JW How did the approach change?

ETF NI Beforehand it was whatever the countries wanted. So now actually it has become much more difficult for us. Because vocational education [was a weak] area of the *acquis*. So we had somehow to square it with the employment strategy, which *is* important because the employment strategy has a very clear framework for all the countries. They will get the money if they fit within that framework...you had to link with it.

The process of developing terms of reference, led by external consultants and agencies, could be a rather a 'hit or miss' approach:

JW ...do you find those terms of reference accurately reflect the needs of the country or the situation ... are they intelligently drawn up?

CON Hu I should say it depends who wrote it and when, and when the project started. Concerning *Phare* and *CARDS* projects ... the terms of reference for these...was written always by foreign experts, not by the beneficiary country... Because it was written by a foreign expert and depending whom this expert met in the country when they prepared their terms of reference, for which usually one or two weeks was allocated only, depending on that you may say that it was correct or not.

CON UK described the basic process in drawing up the terms of reference, moving from policy intentions and agreed strategies to particular projects designed to achieve particular goals relevant to those strategies:

JW So you were writing the high level programme which, if I understand it right is broadly speaking the priorities in that sector?

CON UK Yes, at that time, because there was only a limited amount of money, I actually wrote the detailed terms of reference as well...

JW They're conceived as separate phases are they?

CON UK They are normally. One follows from the other. So you'd say, for example, you'd say things like, oh, "We really need to concentrate on SME competitiveness", and then you would normally, you would normally liaise – at country level – normally with the minister or a senior adviser to the prime minister. You'd normally liaise and say "Well really what do you think you need?" But at the end of day the European Union has got to make that final decision because it's their money. Nowadays it's rather more sophisticated, because you have a series of documents... and based on the agreement, the international agreement, signed between the

EU and the country, you will then be able to determine what the key priorities are.

However, as the UK consultant explained, a 'standard approach' could easily develop and be transferred from one country to another:

CON UK Well, one of the interesting things in respect of the response is you sometimes will get – shall we say in Albania – a project that has loads of references, all the way through, to Kosovo. ...There is a temptation in some of the weaker, let's say weaker [EU] Delegations, or younger Delegations, to do that. I mean for example in Kosovo...all the people there joined this delegation, and they all brought with them their terms of reference – it was the natural thing to do. So what tends to happen, if they get an identified problem, they don't spend too much time on researching or refining the local situation.

JW So everyone's copying from another Delegation? The consultants are copying the things they did last time, or somewhere else ... There's a sort of accepted wisdom, is there?

CON UK Yes, well, in respect of SMEs there are internationally agreed policies and guidelines and what have you. And it's quite clear that there's not much deviation from those.

But perhaps fine tuning to needs was not the real point. From the Team Leader's point of view a project marked real, rather than merely rhetorical, engagement by the EU:

TL UK Our current terms of reference you can identify at least four different styles of writing in there....Once the TOR's developed it's not so important what's in it – the fact is that there is a project and VET, in this case, is being supported ...I don't think they are necessarily appropriate to the problems facing VET. I mean obviously that's the focus of them, but there's also this issue that what is important is to have some engagement, form of engagement by the EU with VET; how appropriate it is is another thing. But the question is, when we talk about appropriacy if you look at the amount of money that's spent on equipment – and I don't think there's anyone who has any doubt that this often a waste of money to a large extent, and yet this goes on time and time again.

On the topic of money for new buildings and equipment, which as we learned earlier from one of the ETF interviewees was often the first item wanted by countries, there evidently is some feeling that such concrete items were necessary to 'sugar the pill' of less palatable attempts to bring about changes in curriculum and policy:

JW I suppose there's a sense in which equipment, I mean looked at not cynically, but it is an outward and visible manifestation of a sort...?

TL UK It photographs well, and you never ever get a Head of Delegation or a Minister being photographed next to a curriculum document, but ... you will get them smiling at equipment. ...So it does serve a purpose; people think that, you know, they're getting something and certainly, you know, I've been around the country a lot, and countries a lot, and there is no doubt that a local television station, a local radio station, local newspaper, local mayor, will all be extremely interested in €12,000 worth of equipment.

However our Hungarian consultant was not so cynical, pointing out the poor condition of vocational schools and the importance of basic refurbishment:

CON Hu ... it can be a very important part also the infrastructure – investment into infrastructure. Because specifically the Balkan countries, the eastern Balkan countries, in education they have really, really terrible infrastructure...

### **Other interventions**

As we have seen in earlier chapters, projects were only one type of intervention by the EU, though perhaps the most obvious on the ground. Other interventions included the pressure in the accession negotiations, participation – first in European Employment Strategy and later in the *Lisbon* and *Copenhagen* processes – in the 'open method of coordination', and also more general participation in EU networks.

It was clear to all the interviewees that there was very little specific in the *acquis* concerning VET. However evidently the distinction between 'voluntary' participation in the various 'open method' instruments and the strict requirements for accession was not understood by all in the eastern countries:

ETF Fr ...since those countries are far from the development of the [older] EU countries about policy development, there is a tendency to take the message as a prescription. More than something voluntary, and probably... it's because the EU officers when dealing with the preparation for the *acquis communautaire* they are very systematic, not soft, they play a role in this prescriptive role. So, "if you want to accede, you have to ...have a national qualifications framework" In the [existing] member states it's just a recommendation for countries.

However the discipline of the 'open method's' requirement to produce evidence for the enactment of policy and of its results, was welcomed by the Romanian policymaker as healthy in itself:

POL Ro ...we had more or less been guided during the Ceauşescu regime ... on political will, or I should say sometimes on a discretionary basis, rather than based on the evidence that there is a *need* to address education. So all these exercises for inclusion memorandum, for employment policy were very good for developing in the country an evidenced-based culture. And in this respect the policy reporting, it is in my opinion the crucial and the best result of everything.

Moreover politicians in the candidate countries, with their publics aspiring for EU entry and a newly invigorated press keen to hold leaders to account, probably experienced pressure more than those in the existing member states:

POL Ro And you might say it is not binding, but you can read carefully all member states are caring about how they are presenting their situation. It is going now to happen in Bruges, the next reporting, and again we can share reading the way that the member states are [presented] with a draft of the report based on their answers, you will understand they care. They care.

JW So this quite a strong pressure?

POL Ro I think that it is more [than] the pride that is putting them in this position...Because media is playing a role. .. it's because the media is showing "look where you are". They are trying to define what education and training is doing

Our Dutch officer in the ETF recalled some pretty forthright exchanges between EU agencies and country officials over the degree of real implementation of commitments made in policy statements, as opposed to 'going through the motions' to fulfil the letter of them:

ETF NI ...we presented first results [of a report on employment policy] on a one-day meeting. And after about fifteen minutes I had presented the main conclusions – they were about policy. Because there were a lot of policy documents, but they didn't say much. That's what I said there too. That it was not clear what they wanted to achieve with the documents. And there was also the social partnership ... They were consulted, but they were not given any say, and even I quoted the Deputy Minister who told us in one of the interviews that the social partners would approve his work plan on Friday. So it showed a bit how it was working, the social partnership. There was no real dialogue, there was a formal dialogue. And they had difficulties to



accept those [conclusions]. And there were a lot of other things, for instance very few active labour market measures which were aimed at training. No consideration of efficiency... There were a lot of issues.

JW But nevertheless you were now engaged...

ETF NI Exactly.

Though the 'open method' was powerful, the fact that it only really started to impinge on education (as opposed to employment and active labour market measures) after the 2000 *Lisbon Strategy* meant that connections were not immediately made with the accession process which was by then well underway:

ETF Fr I remember it has been a big conference in... Bayonne about lifelong learning. When the Commission was launching its lifelong learning policy after Lisbon 2000. And a big consultation by the Commission and the French government about lifelong learning. They had not invited the candidate countries. So I told the Commission "Why didn't you ask them?" "Because we made a mistake; we should have invited them, but we forgot." ...and if you look at the Council conclusions in this period, '99-2001 you see inside of Europe a big development of education, and when you look at the chapter on enlargement, it makes no reference at all to these developments.

When the right connections were made, though, the new international context allowed some countries to indulge in very welcome bouts of policy learning and borrowing. Serbia, which had suffered international sanctions for much of the 1990s, was a good example:

LEX Se Serbia was closed for eight years. But now it is open there is the possibility to share what happened in this eight years – what is new, what isn't new, and how to get into step with Europe, and other countries. And many things happened in 2001-2 organized by the Ministry, many visits, many people travelled to Europe in different countries learning about experience, especially in the VET area.

Romania, too, had suffered from isolation in the later part of its communist times, and approached the prospect of forming international connections with some relish:

POL Ro Because in many, many cases the fact that during Ceaușescu regime we were not allowed to have access to information it was a revenge attitude – looking for information, looking for information...

This meant that they were especially interested in participating in the collective EU networks, most prominently through the *Copenhagen* process:

JW I'm thinking of the Lisbon process on lifelong learning and in particular the Copenhagen process about the instruments for qualifications and so on. How seriously did you take these European initiatives?

POL Ro Very seriously I have to say and I will tell you why. Because the looking for solutions to our problems in Romania I was very much considering if 27 countries were ready to find a sort of a compromise between their different approaches I thought that at least for Romania it should be a reference point to set our discussions... Romania was the very first country to pilot the framework for quality assurance because we thought instead of re-inventing the wheel, let's take a solution that has been negotiated for years by the different member states... and see if it is feasible to be used in Romania. And by the end we adjusted it to our, let's say, specificity.

However the Team Leader expressed scepticism about whether learning from abroad, at the policy level as distinct from the level of practitioners, could really be effective:

JW At the policy level ... people were always going off to conferences, ETF or CEDEFOP, and meeting people from around Europe and coming back with ideas. I mean is that, sort of, being accepted more or less physically into the club, is that effective do you think, or is it just a gravy train?

TL UK I don't know. I suspect ... you know it's a gravy train, I think. When it comes to organization of work in a vocational school classroom, this is something which can be applied elsewhere. Policy – there are so many reasons why you cannot just take – I'm sure people will have their heads full of "Cannot be done, and that cannot be done". ... what's very difficult to deal with is "It's alright for your country giving support for this, but we've just recovered from Ceaușescu or whatever, or Milosević or whoever". So I don't know, and this 'member of a club' business, I don't know how effective that will be... I mean it's not a meeting of equals, not even remotely equals, whereas at least if I'm a teacher of technical drawing in Germany and Bosnia, at least lines are lines... but policy level stuff, showing people around... No.

## Foreign expertise

I was interested to learn about the attitudes to foreigners arriving as 'experts'. Was this welcome, or was there a wariness about carpetbaggers? As we have seen there was certainly an interest in what happened in other countries, and from our Bulgarian consultant's point of view this extended to seeking advice from what were seen as the more experienced European countries:

JW In these projects ... typically there are foreign experts and you've already said that people are interested in ideas from abroad. Was there ever any resentment that here were these foreigners telling us how to run our country?

CON Bg There always is, yes. This is psychological. It's psychological issue. You always have, "OK, we have been doing this for so many years and we know what happens in our country. And why should somebody from outside come to here." So from psychological point of view, this always exists. But actually I think that people in Bulgaria were interested to see what the European experts will say. And ...I think that the trust in the experts who come from the EU 15 countries, the original European countries, the trust was higher than the trust in the experts that were coming from eastern countries. And this is also psychological thing.

When – as in Romania – there was not a firm view about what was the right path, then it was very helpful to be able to make comparisons with, and between, the new set of European countries in which they found themselves:

JW ...was there any opposition, did people say we're just pursuing the policies of the European Commission, we're the puppets ... Because in my country we would have some...

POL Ro No, no, no, no. because you have to distinguish very clearly between the old and the new. Because we were very much looking to the European Commission and not pretending that everything that is coming from there is very good for us, but at least the degree of acceptance was higher than the one usually [seen in] member states where you already have a policy that is giving results. So in our case because we were ...having nothing in our hand but looking for developing ... people would say that there are other, let's say, approaches on the planet, let's question to which extent the others are also valid to us, but not being reluctant to take them, but by having a sort of, I should say, comparative analysis.

However attitudes towards the question of learning from foreigners did vary between countries in the experience of the Team Leader:

TL UK ...here, it came up even this morning, a conversation with people I've worked with for four years, you know, the issue that I'm a foreigner and we're a foreign project was raised. That we were imposing foreign ideas, and I just held my hand in my head (*sic*)... In Romania... basically you put an EU flag on it and people would salute it and .. OK, we all know it's a game, but it worked, it got them into the EU. ... Here it's exactly, well not exactly, but it's almost exactly the opposite with some people. That the fact that it's done [abroad] is a bad thing because what's done here is how things should be done, and there's no reason to change it.

When it came down to the effectiveness of individual consultants, most interviewees stressed that it was their individual qualities and preparedness to understand the domestic situation that was important, rather than their nationality:

LEX Se Some experts were excellent. Really excellent because they understood the situation and they understood in what country they are, what is the previous experience, what we had and what is now. And the whole situation regarding politics and economy – everything. But some experts they didn't know in what country they are and some experts they didn't prepare [themselves] for Serbia and they tried to give something what is a typical framework or model, never mind that it's not real in Serbia.

One ETF official, who had dealt with many different projects, made an interesting distinction between those consultants who viewed working on projects as their long-term career, and those who took part as a break from their domestic career:

ETF NI You have two types of consultants, I think, possibly ... The first one these are the ... [professional] consultants. Actually they are not any more in contact with their own system. They operate anywhere. And they are very good at marketing themselves.

JW Project people?

ETF NI Project people. Hopping from one country to another. There are quite a lot of them around. ... And then there are some exceptional cases where you have people who are looking for a break of their routine. One year out, *etc.* They of course are very much embedded in the context of where they come from. I think it depends at what stage the countries are as to what type of consultant would be good for them. In the beginning somebody who is more general. Who knows a bit about everything, how to sort out things. ... The problem is that they have commercial interests not to finish their job. For if they finish their job they have to go out, so they have an interest not to finish, so they can get the next assignment. ... The others ... think more in systems, because

they come from a system, and I think that's important actually, because ...[it is] the connection with the system which is actually the most difficult part. But without that we won't have any results.

Our rather world-weary Hungarian observer had a whole lexicon of national types, graded in terms of their certainty that their own country had found the best solutions:

CON Hu Some experts ... simply repeat their own experience which was a solution for some problems within a given country.... In my opinion this is a big mistake, and actually I can tell you that the most rigid, the most rigid from this point of view are the Germans and the French. But some also, a lot of UK experts.. are simply not willing to understand the country's specificity, but this is somehow, you know, the old Empire – the whole world is for us, and you are a foreigner even in your own ... And those who I met, this type of rigidity I met with Greek experts. But in their case I think it was just that they were rigid. Not because of their own cultural background, but they...they are also from a totalitarian system in a way so ... But for example when I met people from Central Europe, Czechs or Slovaks or Polish – even Bulgarians – they were not this type, they will always try to understand what are the specifics of that given country...

JW And from the way you talk, it sounds as if the French and the Germans and maybe the British too, have a firm idea of what is a good system.

CON Hu Not all of the UK experts but some of them. But the Germans almost always [laughs].

For the Team Leader, national background counted, but it was experience in the project role of consultant rather than specific technical expertise which mainly led to effectiveness:

TL UK I don't think that the national background, in a sense, has much to do with it at all. It's very useful being British rather than Bulgarian. It's very useful being Austrian rather than Macedonian. ... Just in terms of initial credibility.

JW So there's some kind of pecking order..?

TL UK ... Seriously though, there is. I think that Britain is well thought of, and I think that this is not unreasonable. OK, it's not total, and it's not something which we should take for granted, and I don't say that Brits outrank Germans or Austrians, they're all well thought of. So, in that sense, yes, being a particular nationality is important, but it's [much more] about personal qualities. It's down to experience now, because some of the most effective experts, and experts who can deploy most rapidly and make connections most quickly are those – not of particular nationalities – but those that have done this kind of thing before, and having experience of other countries rather than your home country actually helps

most – having been involved in this kind of change management or VET development or whatever in any other *comparable* situations...

Nevertheless the country background of projects, and of influential consultants within them, could apparently be critical in terms of the subsequent trajectory of a beneficiary state, with a certain level of identification with the country which they had drawn on as a model:

ETF NI ... we speak about the Irish model for Estonia, the Scottish model for Slovenia, because the consultants came from Ireland or Scotland.

Some countries engaged in a deliberate policy of ‘shopping around’ for attractive or workable VET models. We have already seen something of this in Romania, but Serbia was also an example:

JW Were there any countries which offered a model that people were particularly impressed by?

LEX Se Denmark, especially Denmark, Slovenia and ... Especially Denmark. It was many people came and visited, and in Slovenia. Of course Slovenia was very close because we had the same background, educational background, regarding pedagogy, didactic and everything [concerned with] the understanding of educational process.

If countries shopped around, it was also the case that some ‘donor’ countries engaged in active marketing, as in Bulgaria:

CON Bg People were really interested ... from Germany and in Austria, maybe because...these were more close. And also maybe because there were organizations from Germany ... like GoPA, who were already investing in education and training in Bulgaria. So this was a kind of synergy between European fundings and fundings coming from German government. This could be one of the reasons that people were really interested what happens there.

JW So it wasn't so much because you wanted to have the same system, but because in a way these countries were prepared to invest and were good at marketing.

CON Bg Yes...For sure.

### **The reform package**

We saw in the preceding chapter how a distinctive mode of intervention emerged in the early days of *Phare* and – with some additions and changes – seems to have survived well into the 2000s. The interviewees had little difficulty in recognizing it when I referred to it.

I was keen to learn where this model came from. Before he joined the ETF, the Danish official had been in the task force that preceded the creation of DG Enlargement where the *Phare* support packages were first devised. His explanation for the form of the package was simply down to the predilections of the individual staff members who designed the first interventions:

JW But what strikes me is how similar the projects are. You've mentioned just now the pilot school approach, broader curriculum, decentralization, social partnership – you know the list. It seems that there is somewhere a model of what a VET system should look like. Where did that come from?

ETF Dk From '93 to '96 there were two individuals in the pre-DG Enlargement who prepared all the projects. So they split the countries between them. And that is the approach they had. ...It was really what individuals brought with them of experience. These two individuals in education came from Ministries of Education.

JW Could you tell me their countries? I don't want to know the names...

ETF Dk The Netherlands and Denmark.

JW It's like a little ball which grows, a critical path. That is fascinating.

ETF Dk And then of course it has moved over to ETF, but also here the first projects or programmes that we then managed would still have been, at the least the basics, would have come from colleagues [in the Commission].

One might think that the Commission's Directorate General which dealt with education (DG EAC) would have had a hand in determining the nature of the interventions, but the same interviewee was definite that they had not:

JW ...staying with your impressions of the Commission, these decisions came from DG Enlargement. I guess they didn't know much about education, and certainly not about VET. Was your impression that the DGs concerned with education in particular had any influence about the nature of ...

ETF Dk No.

JW You say that very definitely...

ETF Dk They were not considered much of a partner. In VET they were not considered a partner at that time.

JW Do you know why not?

ETF Dk They were trying to steal the budget through the *Tempus* [higher education] programme. That's partly a joke, but only partly... DG EAC has never really seen the Western

Balkans or the pre-accession region as a priority. And their focus was higher education. And for the rest they were not involved. Personally, though I worked in ETF since 96, I think 2008 is the first time I have actually gone to visit people in this DG, maybe 2007, the first time I went to see DG EAC...

JW ... your overall impression was they were not very active?

ETF Dk That was it; they had a formal role as part of the inter-service consultation. And that has, in reality, continued up until today.

JW But not being involved is one thing – did you have the impression there was any conflict about this or just different priorities?

ETF Dk I think DG EAC has different priorities, I think DG Enlargement has at times not understood why they took so little interest. That's more the informal [talk] ... that you don't get any input from them.

If, for the Danish ETF officer, the model stemmed from the instincts of a couple of early members of DG Enlargement, for his Dutch counterpart in the ETF, it represented the prevailing international consensus of the time:

JW Turning back to the VET projects...What strikes me is how similar, there's pilot schools, a modular curriculum, competence assessment, now there's a qualifications framework [ETF NI agrees throughout this list]. If you look at this mixture, it's not the same as probably any old member state. It's like a new model VET system – where did this come from?

ETF NI This is a sort of common denominator. Of reforms. And what is happening elsewhere also...

JW ... If we call it a model system, these elements did they just come from the previous projects – did you inherit them?

ETF NI The model approach [was in vogue] very much. Boosting the labour market in many countries, you can see it in the Netherlands, you can see it in Spain, in the UK too. So that came. And the ILO was promoting it also. And these models of [employability] skills which they promoted as active labour market measures and employability issues. It was really a [big] issue at the time. It was also adult learning, the decade of adult learning.... They're not only in our projects, you can find them with other agencies too, and other reforms.

However, from the three experienced ETF interviewees, it transpired there was yet another explanation for the nature of the reform package. The French interviewee considered that the origins of the consultants was critical, coupled with the practical difficulties of introducing the admired German 'Dual System':



ETF Fr ... it was my observation that it was [apparent] to see when I started to look at the programmes that... the Anglo-Saxon approach was dominant because of people, of experts working in this technical assistance.

JW Do you think that was the reason?

ETF Fr They came from the UK or from Ireland.... So I think we had at that time two big models trying really to be developed in the countries according to this technical assistance, and also by bilateral assistance. The Anglo-Saxon approach and also the German approach. Because countries they were very [conscious of] the big success of Germany – the influence of Germany was very strong. But they were not ready due to the low preparation of enterprises. Enterprises were just becoming private, so it was difficult for them [to develop apprenticeship].

JW And I think you need some kind of history....?

ETF Fr Absolutely. And some countries like Slovenia who decided immediately for ideological reasons to start with apprenticeship, after 5 years or maybe 10 years they understood that it didn't work and that it was not so easy.... So the Dual System was really a reference for many countries and [the Germans] were pushing very much – they were trying to influence the process. And at the same time the other model which was also very prominent was the NVQ system developed in the UK and which was maybe supported very much by many consultants.

And why did the French not feature more prominently? After all they had a school-based vocational education system similar in many ways to those in eastern Europe:

ETF Fr And my big observation, and also maybe a frustration, is that in those countries who are much closer to the French system. But the French they didn't really [feature] ... the Ministry of Education in France is organized in such a way that there are no consultants going round to tender, so I haven't seen any French consultant in that period in the field of VET – never, never. The consultants came from the UK, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany, and that's it. The French were very much involved in *Phare* programmes about ... telecommunications, transport but not at all in vocational education and training, where they could have brought very important things...

Whatever its origins, the curriculum package faced difficulties of assimilation in new soil. Though apparently simple and flexible, a modular curriculum did not mesh in logistically with the established practices in vocational schools in Bulgaria:

CON Bg We had a technical assistance project in the late 90s on trying to develop module-based curricula. And what

happened is that during the project everything was quite OK, all these modules were developed, the content was developed, and they were piloted in the schools. But later on they did not become a reality because actually the modular system – within the schools – is quite contradictory to the way that the school year in Bulgaria is organized. And they were contradictory to our administration system. They were contradictory to the way the curricula is designed concerning time schedules. It was contradictory towards the assessment of the students; we don't have this modular system of assessment, we needed to have a mark at the end of the first term, which you cannot have. So what actually happened is ... the modular system is not really used in the schools. It moved to adult education, because it is much more relevant to the way the VET for adults is structured.

In Romania there were different interpretations of outcome-based standards emanating from different sources and giving rise to considerable confusion, as the ETF officer who had been in charge of monitoring developments in that country explained:

ETF NI You always find only occupational standards, that's really what they are stuck with in many countries, and this is a real area of concern. It started with the World Bank – promoting very much occupational standards. ... But what we saw in Romania, they started to develop big sets of occupational standards, so training could become more responsive to the labour market. But those occupational standards were not really linked with the training, so that's often the problem. ... Now you have the standards – how are you going to use them? And it still is a problem in many countries. In Romania they are also not being used for IVET because the training standards that have been developed by the [Ministry of Education's] VET Centre they are also occupational standards in a way. They're broader and they're...

JW They have some pedagogical feel to them...

ETF NI Yes, exactly. And of course that's the difference between labour market entrants and people who are already active as professionals.

In Serbia the new curriculum package fed straight into the conflicts between reformers and traditionalists that we noted earlier, with little consideration on either side of the actual merits of a modular structure to the curriculum:

JW ...my own experience in Serbia has been that you just have to say "modular" or you just have to say "competence", and this is like a signal for a fight to begin. Do you recognize this?

LEX Se Yes. Yes. ... maybe understanding what modules [are] could be different. But in this situation if you

say “module” there will be fighting. Never mind if they understand or not. Never mind if they accept it or do they *need* modules. No, just fighting. ...We don't have flexibility because we are thinking “module on this way it should be” – nothing else. Or, “no modules, nothing”, no. It is just two poles.

## **Discussion**

It is of course dangerous to draw conclusions based on the views of a few people, interviewed for the most part in a foreign language, and with – no doubt – all kinds of personal agendas. However, taken together with what we have learned previously, we can be reasonably confident of a number of points.

First, it seems plain that the EU's policy on VET in eastern Europe was not, initially, the result of extending the VET policy initiatives of the EU itself to the putative new members. The small group of staff in DG Enlargement were primarily concerned with building up the *Phare* programme, and did so in ways which made sense to them rather than following an agenda set by the Commission's education unit. In the early days, therefore, there seems to have been something of a vacuum which the new recruits to DG Enlargement filled as best they could. The consultants, too, made some of the running, reflecting to an extent their own country backgrounds, but also promoting what were then 'modern' ideas of what new styles of vocational education should be, stripped of any very distinctive national characteristics.

In due course it was DG Employment that took up the reins, promoting the 'open method of coordination' which seems to have been particularly effective in spurring action in at least some of the candidate countries. Only later, after *Lisbon* in 2000, and particularly after *Copenhagen* in 2002, did the policies from the Commission's education side start to elide with the agenda for VET in the East. In practice this meant that it only had a marginal effect on accession issues.

Though at the outset there was a preparedness to design projects around the needs and wishes of a country, it soon transpired that many beneficiary countries were not in a position to specify what they needed with any precision. Again, this resulted in something of a vacuum, leaving room for

individual consultants to suggest the way ahead. A further syndrome of this lack of steering was that something of a 'standard model' for reform took root, being transposed from country to country without serious questioning. Although with the advent of the *Employment Strategy* the Commission began to set an agenda, the standard model persisted in some shape or form well into the 2000s. But where countries were in a position to shape projects in order to contribute to well thought-out reforms, the Commission, and project members, were likely to welcome this and to respond to it.

The consultants involved in the projects and the companies that deployed them became quite specialized. 'Project people' from a limited range of established member states, but not practising at home any longer, moved between eastern countries. There was scope, therefore, for a distinctive professional approach to a 'preferred model' for VET to take hold in the world of the projects.

Policy development in, and on behalf of, eastern European countries was increasingly undertaken by projects, though often not materially engaged with policymakers in the countries concerned. Some policies were drafted by consultants working virtually in isolation.

The reaction of countries to project interventions was highly varied and may have been unpredictable to those initiating projects. While some national policymakers actively welcomed projects and shaped them to what they saw as their needs, others stood back either because they did not have the capacity to take initiatives or because they were uncertain of the direction they should take. Moreover, as in the Serbian example, it was possible for projects to find themselves enmeshed in on-going or emerging disputes about policy within a country, with unpredictable consequences.

Because the standard model was confined to pilot schools in the first instance and because extending beyond the pilots was either financially or politically problematic, this package did not take root in many countries. However domestic actors involved in pilots and projects (eg. local experts) went on to achieve influential positions in their countries' VET systems, so the pilot approaches were able, to an extent, to endure.

In principle the eastern countries were especially open to influence from the West at the time. They were probably more attracted to seeing western practice for themselves, as opposed to having foreigners implement their

ideas in their own countries, which some in the countries concerned – though by no means all – viewed with reservations. Some eastern countries actively shopped around for solutions, and most were keen participants in EU networks.

However, as reported by the ETF officials and the Romanian policymaker, the difficulties in arriving at a coherent domestic programme about the way forward on VET, let alone achieving anything approaching a national consensus, were evident. It was easy for the EU authorities and project participants to underestimate the internal problems of co-ordination within countries.

For all these reasons the interventions through development projects were pretty hit or miss. The absence, at least at first, of a defined EU policy on VET, the somewhat serendipitous formation of the reform package, and the unpredictable receiving environment all meant that projects could by no means be assured of success, or even a warm reception. However, exposure to ‘European’ influences and people with different backgrounds does seem to have been welcome and stimulating, though not always in the ways originally intended.

## **EU Integration**

The evidence in this chapter would seem to lend some considerable weight to the constructivist camp. Both consultants and practitioners have attested to the impact of interchange and study visits. These concrete and personal interactions seemed to have been as, if not very often more, important than the expert ‘technical’ assistance offered through projects. Rather surprisingly, few interviewees – whether representing ‘donors’ or ‘beneficiaries’ – spoke of resentment about the importation of foreign ideas. Certainly, crass individuals could fail to make an impact, and there could be a reaction in defence of established national practices – though in the principal instance of this, in Serbia, one suspects that internal politics was more of a factor than external intervention.

At the policy level, eastern policymakers seem to have participated in EU networks with enthusiasm – in the cases of Romania, and indeed of Serbia, we have heard of active search for ‘European’ models. Interchange and

contact have undoubtedly been welcome, though just how far they have influenced domestic practice is not easy to discern.

There is limited and mixed evidence to support inter-governmentalism. Consultants saw themselves, and were seen by others, as seeking to promote the approach to VET of their country of origin. Thus there was talk of 'Irish', 'German' *etc.* models of VET. But, with the exception of our Bulgarian interviewee, there was no suggestion that the natural tendency for a person to seek to transmit elements of the system of VET with which they are familiar had mutated into a government-to-government marketing effort. It is true that there were examples of this in the VET arena – bilateral projects were undertaken, for example by the German state-sponsored *GTZ* which explicitly sought to promote the 'Dual System'. But none of the consultants interviewed seemed so see themselves as in any way representing their governments. Even though some state-sponsored organizations acted as contractors for the EU (for example the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and the British Council), they did not necessarily exclusively employ their own nationals as consultants. Indeed the British Team Leader interviewed was, at the time, working for a German contracting company.

On the other hand this chapter gives something of an insight into the importance of gaining support from the government of the 'beneficiary' country. While outright opposition in either the accession negotiations or in the course of development projects, was rare, and there were few attempts at explicit bargaining, there is clear evidence of recalcitrance, lack of support or evasiveness in some of these interviews, and to how such governmental attitudes could easily obstruct the outcomes desired by the EU. Intergovernmentalists tend to assume that internal preferences in the countries participating in negotiations are set; there is evidence here that they are fluid and may be influenced by the process of interaction with external forces.

These interviews also allow an insight into the path-dependent and bureaucratic explanations favoured by the neo-functionalists. The account given by the Danish ETF interviewee would seem to be a classic example of how some serendipitous events (in this case the presence of particular officials at a particular time, coupled with something of a policy vacuum) resulted in a standard *Phare* approach to VET. The import of terms of

reference in one project into those for another country illustrates 'spill-over' at its most basic level. And the emergence of 'project people' increasingly detached from their countries of origin, but developing a standardized technocratic approach to capacity-building for VET, seems to accord with the neo-functionalist theory that institutions will naturally shape themselves to the tasks they need to perform.

Conversely, there is little evidence from these interviews that economic rationales or factors played a large role on the ground. It may be that this was assumed, or regarded as an issue for higher policy, but the emphasis from those interviewed seems to be that it was accepted – on all sides – that the modernization of VET on the lines proposed was either a good thing in itself, or because it was 'European' and promoted by EU institutions.\* While clearly there were interests which needed to be brought on side (or at least neutralized) in the beneficiary countries, the motivations of these stakeholders seem to have been interpreted fairly straightforwardly: there is no reference to wider global forces, or to the need to take account of any particular settlement between capital and labour. Indeed, the evidence from the Dutch ETF official points to the EU institutions actively trying to stimulate participation in the form of social dialogue by employers and unions from a weak domestic base.

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\* The Dutch ETF official does attribute the emergence of the 'standard package' to a contemporary consensus about VET in international organizations. His two colleagues, though, consider that it arose as a result of other factors.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### PATHOLOGY AND PROGNOSIS: Conclusions and Reflections on the Future

#### Introduction

In this final chapter I want to do a number of things. First, to answer the research questions initially posed (page 13), and then to evaluate, so far as is possible, what effects the EU's intervention in VET has had in the countries concerned, including drawing on more recent evidence which falls outside the timeframe of the main body of this study.

Second, I shall draw together what the story of the EU's intervention in VET in eastern Europe has to say about the various theories of European integration, on which we have commented at various points throughout this study.

Third, I shall reflect on the effectiveness of the methodological approach and methods used in this thesis and whether, with the benefit of hindsight, other approaches might have been more effective. I shall also consider what future lines of research might prove fruitful in this field.

Last, I shall consider the implications for future policy, reflecting on lessons that might be learned from this extended episode, as the EU continues to attempt to influence VET policies both amongst potential new members and more widely.\*

#### Research questions

##### *The nature of the EU's intervention in VET*

Our first questions were to ascertain in what way the EU intended to influence VET in eastern Europe, and why it focussed on the particular issues selected for attention.

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\* The European Training Foundation lists 30 non-EU countries, from Iceland to Tajikistan, where it is working on VET and employment-related issues (European Training Foundation, 2013).



The approach clearly evolved over time. On the one hand it changed with the EU's maturing assessment of what developments were desirable in the East. On the other hand the EU's stance also reflected shifts in its role in the VET policies in respect of its existing member states – what we might call the EU's 'internal' VET policy. Through the intertwining of these two separate strands – perceptions of the needs of the East and the evolution of EU VET policy itself – we can construct three phases, each concerned with rather different issues.

In the earliest phase, roughly 1990-96, the first strand – changes in perceptions of what was appropriate in the East – seems to have been focussed on modernizing existing initial VET. As we have seen (Chapter Ten, page 173), the early *Phare* projects were concerned with updating curricula and introducing new occupational profiles for what were thought to be the jobs of the future. Funds for refurbishment of premises and equipment also featured. During this period, internal EU VET policy was not well articulated, focussing on inter-country co-operation supplemented by modest financial support in the form of the Commission's comparatively small education programmes. Though talk was beginning about the need for European competitiveness and the role of VET in that, there was little direction from the Commission Directorates concerned with either employment or education. In the East, therefore, the field was left open to co-ordination by DG Enlargement (whose principal interest was successful economic transition and accession), and – on the ground – to initiatives by teams of consultants from existing member states.

The consultants, in turn, tended to favour either the widely admired German Dual System or a new curriculum model inspired by the outcomes-based NVQ movement in the UK and Ireland, which held attractions as heralding a 'fresh start'. Efforts to institute Dual System approaches to initial VET were limited by a lack of a wide tradition of apprenticeships in many of the countries and – especially – by the weak and rapidly shifting base of employers (Chapter Eight, page 152 and Chapter Ten, page 217).<sup>\*</sup> The outcomes-based approach, which evolved into a distinctive 'curriculum

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<sup>\*</sup> Even in what might be regarded as more promising territory, there were difficulties in replicating German apprenticeships "...the new Lander from the former East Germany face considerable problems in offering a VET provision which is anywhere near comparable to that which was taken for granted in the former West Germany." (Evans, Behrens and Kaluza, 2000, p.142)

package', also failed at the time to take deep root outside the pilots, but retained some currency amongst a number of domestic actors who had been involved in piloting.

This early phase was therefore characterised by looseness of policy, experimentation, cross-fertilization from established member states and a belief in 'bottom-up' infusion of practice through the device of 'pilot schools'.

An intermediate phase ensued in the late 1990s. At this point EU policy in the employment field, though not in education, took on a new force in the shape of the European Employment Strategy. This approach, involving VET's role in reducing unemployment together with an emphasis on planning and commitments to explicit targets at country level, was carried through to the eastern countries where DG Employment joined DG Enlargement as an active interlocutor. The Commission education interests still did not play a significant part. At the same time it was realized that the 'bottom-up' strategy was not greatly affecting national policymaking in the eastern countries and more direct efforts were instituted to elicit (and sometimes virtually to write) national policy and strategy documents leading in time to new legislative frameworks.

As well as support from projects, pressure on the eastern administrations was mounted through increasingly frequent and critical public monitoring reports directly linked to accession. In many ways these reflected the *Employment Strategy's* 'open method of co-ordination' which was being applied internally to existing member states, but with higher stakes for the East where participation in it was seen as virtually a condition for accession.

During this second phase the focus shifted from initial VET to adult training and re-training which would have a greater immediate effect on employment. Preparation for the administration of the European Social Fund (ESF), which presumed a framework for national human resource planning on which future ESF projects would be based, was also a feature.

The third phase, from around 2001 until accession, saw the emergence of a more definite internal EU stance on VET with respect to the existing member states. First there was the extending of the employment strategy under the *Lisbon* agenda to include a role for education and training which went wider than active labour market measures and included initial VET

and lifelong learning. Second, the *Copenhagen* process put flesh on the bones of co-operation in VET through the devising of, and securing countries' participation in, a series of 'common instruments' such as the European Qualifications Framework. Both of these new approaches were extended to eastern European countries pretty much from their inception.

While continuing the pressure on policy formation and the generation of national development plans which emerged in the second phase, this third phase saw a rather more eclectic range of support projects which returned, as in the first phase, to focus on VET's role as part of the education system, as well as its role in supporting employment. Preparation for the *Copenhagen* instruments featured in the last rounds of the accession negotiations and in *Phare* projects, though the 'curriculum package' which had evolved in the first phase still featured a good deal. Eastern countries were encouraged to advance reforms on a broad front, with more scope for national policymakers to determine what features should be attended to in what order – though not all responded to this invitation to steer reforms.

#### *The methods of influence*

Our next question was about process. How did the EU pursue these aims? There were three basic approaches:

- support for development through projects which continued throughout the period, though with a shifting focus;
- the bilateral agreeing of aims with each country with regular monitoring and public reporting during the accession process, in much the same manner as the 'open method of co-ordination' used for existing member states;
- rather less explicitly, the personal involvement of a range of eastern VET stakeholders, including educational practitioners, national policymakers and relevant social partners, through a range of measures: the early and enlightened decision to open the EU's transnational education programmes to the eastern countries (page 114); the inclusion of study tours as part of many support projects (page 201); the formation of VET 'observatories' in each country which had the effect of drawing relevant academics into a broader network (page 173); and the participation of policymakers in working

groups formed to take forward the various instruments of the *Copenhagen* process (page 128), as well as in the activities of CEDEFOP and transnational thematic projects organized by the ETF.

While we are dealing with process, it is worth reflecting on what the case of VET in the East has to say with regard to the observations of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005b) who outline three methods whereby the eastern countries were 'Europeanized'. These were through : (a) facilitating 'lesson drawing' – inspiring people inside the country to emulate established EU policies and practices; (b) through external incentives – rewards for desired behaviour and sanctions for failure to comply; and (c) through encouraging 'social learning' – whereby influential individuals take part in networks and identify personally with a reform agenda. One can readily see that the three approaches which applied to VET (support projects, conditions for accession, and involvement in networks) map on to this template.

Having examined the handling of a number of sectoral issues during the enlargement process (though not including either employment or education), Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier conclude that the second, 'rationalist', method of explicit incentives – the use of '*acquis* conditionality' – was more significant in changing behaviour in the East than the other two 'social constructivist' methods (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005a). They consider that in the absence of conditionality "... the Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe would have remained limited and patchy." (ibid, p.220).

Can we draw the same conclusion in the case of VET? I believe we can. We have seen that the development projects had a distinctly 'hit or miss' character to them. Although some were undoubtedly successful, many sank without trace. This is not surprising given that – as our experts explained in Chapter Ten – a project needed to be undertaken not only at the right time, but on the right scale and with staff who had not only the technical ability but also the personal chemistry to establish credibility. None of these items was, or perhaps realistically could be, guaranteed by the design and selection processes for projects. Even if these issues were successfully addressed, a further condition of success remained; active support from significant internal actors (typically within ministries or key

agencies) was needed, and moreover these supporters needed to be able to overcome internal opposition (from rival ministries or local vested interests). It was very difficult for the EU authorities to gauge the internal situation down to this level of detail; even good projects could fail to win vital local backing.

While the pressures of conditionality – the requirement for action on specific fronts in the European Employment Strategy and the monitoring of them as part of the accession process itself – were inevitably rather broad brush, it appears that they certainly had effects. It is true that the moves to expand adult training which took place across the region (Chapter Six, page 106) had started before either the *Employment Strategy* or the accession negotiations had begun. However, it is hard to imagine that the increasing systematization of this new and disorganized sector – the application of qualifications to it, the accreditation of providers and the targeting of public funding to direct it towards particular groups – would have happened without the encouragement of the EU. Similarly the recasting of VET legislation and the generation of national human resource development plans, which took place in many countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s, was plainly encouraged by the EU and it seems unlikely that these would have been undertaken without the external pressure which was applied in the accession process.

The ‘social learning’ dimension should not be dismissed, but is harder to evaluate as it took so many different forms. Undoubtedly participation in EU networks was popular with the individuals involved, if only for the opportunities it offered for the foreign travel that had been denied for so long. And – as a number of our interviewees have testified – it opened eyes as to what might be possible at home. We can probably agree with Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, however, that “It required the credible prospect of EU membership and the credible linkage of membership with rule adoption to focus the CEECs on the *EU* [rather than other international practices]... and to overcome domestic inertia and resistance” (2005a, p.221). In short, without the strong framework engendered by the pressures of accession social learning might have been unfocussed and ineffective.

### Explaining the EU's stance

The fourth research question was how we can explain the approaches that the EU adopted on VET in the East. It is difficult to track down any detailed EU statement of VET policy with respect to the eastern countries, and the fact that both the focus and the method shifted over time would argue against there having been any deliberate and consistent policy on this topic. Rather it seems that policy on VET was something of a by-product of other forces, some internal to the EU and others external to it.

External forces were certainly present in the shape of the stresses of economic transition, the influence of external consultants and – probably to a lesser extent – the preferences of political actors within the eastern countries themselves. However more significant, it appears, were the forces within the EU which acted to form and influence its stance on VET in the East. Policy on enlargement led the way, dictating the scale and nature of the projects in the early days. The general enlargement process, setting conditions for accession and monitoring progress in conforming with them, also led naturally to the pressures on VET arising from the ‘regular reports’ and monitoring by the ETF that we examined in Chapter Eight. Moreover, perhaps because it had no VET policy of its own, DG Enlargement seemed happy to permit and even absorb some of the approaches promoted by the various external consultants who were engaged on projects and who helped to design them.

The internal EU forces which gave rise, first to the *Employment Strategy*, and then to *Lisbon* and *Copenhagen*, clearly influenced the stance on VET in the East as each emerged. We can also cite, as a primarily internal feature, the preparations for participation in the ESF, which influenced both the ‘regular reports’ (page 151) and the design of *Phare* projects (page 174) in the early 2000s.

It is worth remarking on this finding. It was not primarily the VET needs of the East, whether articulated by their national policymakers or diagnosed by the EU, which drove the EU's support and influence, but rather the shifting agendas on VET within the EU itself. These in turn, as we saw in Chapter Four, were a result of complex interplays of other EU-wide agendas with different stances on VET emerging at different times. Thus Kingdon's (1985) account of the policymaking process as being a somewhat inchoate affair with alternative policies jostling with each other

until appropriate windows for implementation open (see page 37), would seem to fit the case of VET policy towards the East. We can also detect the influence both of 'street-level' actors (Lipsky, 1979) in the form of the external consultants, and of 'epistemic communities' (Adler and Haas, 1992), in the shape of the 'technicist' groups (including participants from the East) which put together the *Copenhagen* instruments, and again in the emergence amongst the cadre of external consultants of something of a collective and distinctive agenda for reform.

The primarily internal drivers of EU policy may help explain the rather curious lack of reference to there being a 'deficit' in eastern VET in comparison with the systems in the West. While we have seen that some in the East presumed that western VET must be more attuned than their own systems to the market conditions they were having to adapt to, there is little evidence of this presumption on the part of the EU. Most commentators (whether eastern or western) seemed to have begun with a presumption that vocational education was a comparative strength of communist systems, and it would seem that this confidence was first eroded in the East, largely due to the perception that VET was failing to cope with the economic pressures of transition. Even when the EU began to adopt a more critical attitude towards eastern VET in the late 1990s, it seems to have been careful not to compare it unfavourably to western systems. This may have been a result of tactful diplomacy, though the monitoring reports examined in Chapter Eight do not otherwise seem to pull their punches. More likely, it results from the fact that the Commission was at the same time (through the *Employment Strategy* and the *Lisbon Process*) undertaking a critique of VET systems in western countries, and was disinclined to claim that these were well-adapted to modern conditions.

### **The effects of EU interventions**

Our last research question concerned the effectiveness of EU influence in the East. As envisaged at the outset (page 14), it is not possible to draw more than tentative conclusions. There are two reasons for this. First, it is probably still too soon to judge whether sustainable change has occurred in the East, less than ten years after the EU interventions connected with accession had run their course. More significant, though, is the difficulty of establishing whether the undoubted changes that have taken place in the East can be attributed to the influence of the EU rather than, say, economic

transition or global trends in modernizing vocational education and training. What follows, therefore, is necessarily somewhat speculative.

We can reasonably confidently ascribe certain changes to forces other than the EU. The expansion of higher education in the East was clearly under way before any material support or pressure from the EU was manifested (page 97). Similarly, as just discussed, a distinctive adult training sector started to emerge before the EU exerted any influence on VET. It seems likely, too, that the up-dating of existing vocational profiles and the establishment of newly relevant ones in initial VET would have occurred without EU assistance.\*

However these early moves were inevitably piecemeal and somewhat chaotic. The unregulated private universities (page 98) and training providers (page 106) which quickly arrived on the scene were of variable quality and were not well articulated with the existing system. We can probably put down some of the systematization that followed to encouragement and support from the EU. In the case of the adult training sector (and rather similarly in the case of higher education, though out of the scope of this study), systems for accreditation of private and ‘third-sector’ providers, often linked to the provision of publicly recognized qualifications, were established in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This represented something of a middle-way – to be found in some other European countries – between a totally free market in adult training (which was what was tending to occur immediately after the fall of communism) and a public sector monopoly through the extension of initial VET schools to adult training, which tended to be the course favoured by many eastern education ministries.

Similarly, the encouragement of systems for developing and recognizing qualifications in a ‘qualifications framework’ were prompted by the EU. Previously qualifications in the East had been a matter for ministries and schools, and methods of systematically including employers and trades unions in the process – again typical in many EU countries – were novel. Indeed the EU’s prescription for involving ‘social partners’ on a sectoral basis in developing, and sometimes endorsing, curricula seems to have

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\* In Serbia, for example, moves to modernize and reformulate vocational curricula started in 2001, before the first EU aid project for VET in 2002.



taken root in most of the eastern countries. In some cases this is confined to their involvement in working parties which develop vocational profiles (*cf.* Latvia, Bulgaria), but increasingly it is on an institutional basis. Romania has over 20 sector committees with legal powers to approve relevant profiles. In the craft sector Hungary recognizes chambers as having jurisdiction over training in their trades. Slovakia assigns profiles to relevant 'Sectoral VET Councils' for an overview. Estonia's 'Professional Councils' devise vocational standards for relevant profiles. Both Croatia and Serbia are establishing advisory councils on a sectoral basis.\*

Systematization can also be seen in the slew of 'white papers' and legislation concerning VET that emerged in the East at around the turn of the century. These were certainly encouraged, if not actually prompted, by the EU (Chapter Eight, page 157). Frequently these enshrined the 'social partnership' model of VET and the principle of equality of access by individuals as well as models of accreditation of providers and qualifications – all themes from the European Social Model, and promoted in the accession negotiations and support projects. The central administrative machinery concerned with VET was also formalized. Many countries established dedicated VET agencies, within or attached to ministries of education, sometimes combined with responsibilities for adult education as in Hungary, Serbia and Croatia, or devoted solely to initial VET as in Romania and Slovenia. The establishment of these agencies was encouraged by the EU; in some cases their origins were in the 'Programme Implementation Units' set up to provide an interface with earlier *Phare* projects (Chapter Nine, page 178).

The systemization of new VET structures, or at least the early adoption of such systematization, might therefore fairly be ascribed to EU interventions. It is no co-incidence, then, that these took roughly similar forms across many of the eastern countries.

In terms of the actual content and forms of training, initial VET seems to have been less affected than adult training. Although a major development in the region was the expansion within initial VET of the 'technical' schools with access to higher education (Chapter Five, page 102), this form of

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\* Information about current developments in this chapter is taken from the country reports on VET developments published by CEDEFOP (CEDEFOP, 2012).

school does not seem to have been especially promoted by the EU. In fact the interventions that the EU did make in the field of initial VET seem to have had a limited effect. Apprenticeship on the *Dual System* model, as we have seen, ran into difficulties as it encountered a weak employer base. Poland seems to be the only eastern country with a sizeable apprenticeship sector, accounting for something like 15 per cent of IVET students\*. Smaller apprenticeship schemes are present in Latvia, Slovenia and Croatia, revived from pre-war arrangements and organized through craft chambers, and half of the (comparatively low number of) Hungarian basic vocational school students have individual contracts with employers for their work experience. A number of countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Romania) have recently introduced regulations to recognize apprenticeship as an educational form, but take-up so far seems very limited.

The other major EU intervention in initial VET was the 'curriculum package' (Chapter Nine, page 180), promoted by many of the external consultants engaged on projects. As with apprenticeship, though for different reasons, this struggled to break out from the pilots. However there is reason to believe that it is enjoying something of a 'second wind' in the form of a more generalized move to express curricula in terms of 'learning outcomes', spurred by the European Qualifications Framework (Méhaut and Winch, 2011)

In adult qualifications and curricula the outcomes-based approach is practically universal in eastern Europe, and it seems increasingly common in initial VET too. However this does not mean that the more traditional syllabus-based approach (involving the specification of teaching inputs) has disappeared. In most countries, for initial VET, groups of practitioners (sometimes involving employers and unions) develop curricula based on previously stipulated learning outcomes. In the case of Lithuania, where vocational curricula were devolved to schools early in the transition period, they are now expected to build these around new, national, 'professional standards'. Occupational standards (the formulation of competences needed at work in different occupations) are a particular form, being found in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania, and Slovenia, though not in all

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\* Confusingly one of the main active labour market measures in Poland is also referred to as apprenticeship, though it is of shorter duration and is not recognized as an educational programme (OECD, 2009).

sectors. In the same vein, modular curricula are present in a number of cases (Estonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and envisaged in new reforms in Latvia and Lithuania) though, again, modular approaches are more prevalent in adult training.

Despite notable setbacks, the trajectory and durability of the outcomes-based approach which has "...swept like an international wind of change through national qualification arrangements" (Oates, 2011, p.xii), raises interesting questions in connection with eastern Europe. It is evidently not the case that the eastern countries were first introduced to this approach as a result of their participation in the pan-European *Copenhagen Process*, or in order to comply with the European Qualifications Framework. On the contrary, they were already quite familiar with it (though often not entirely convinced) as a result of earlier *Phare* projects. Before the eastern countries' accession many had adopted policies "...at the front edge of the VET state-of-play in EU Member States" (Nielsen, 2004, p.45). Indeed one of the early introductions of this approach into continental Europe was through the participation of British and Irish consultants in *Phare* projects in the East, and it may be that this was one way in which the approach gained currency amongst EU VET policymakers. In a stock-take on the 'learning outcomes' approach across Europe, CEDEFOP (2009) noted that the UK's 'NVQ approach' was "the first of its type in Europe" (p.78), that it has been "widely adapted and used in central and eastern Europe" (pp.39-40), particularly in "donor-funded reform projects" (p.42), and that, at the time of writing:

The evidence is that the identification and use of learning outcomes is beginning to occupy a prominent position, particularly where attempts are being made to modernise and reform education and training systems. (p.142)

So the intriguing possibility is that, far from EU policy on outcomes-based organization of VET having influenced the East, the reverse has been the case. It is possible that the emergence of an outcomes-based approach was transmitted to formal EU policy circles, in part at any rate, through the 'curriculum package' articulated in development projects in the East.

We have therefore some fairly immediate effects of EU interventions, largely to do with the systematization of adult training and the establishment of institutional structures, as well as some rather more diffuse effects in terms of spreading the 'outcomes-based' approach, which

may indeed go wider than its impact in the East. But a basic question must be whether the intervention of the EU materially *enhanced* VET in the eastern countries.

We saw in Chapter Five (page 101) that some countries (notably Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia) saw a sharp drop in the proportion of upper secondary students pursuing vocational as opposed to general education tracks. Was this process reversed in later years? If so, we might tentatively ascribe such a reversal of an undoubted trend to the very considerable efforts of the EU to support vocational education.

Figures for the ten eastern countries taken together seem to show a stabilization. Following the drops in the 1990s, the period since accession (2004) has seen little change. For the group of countries as a whole, the proportion pursuing vocational studies was 53.9 per cent in 2004, and in 2011 was 52.2 per cent (Eurostat, 2013b). However, there is a wide variation between countries; the Czech Republic and Slovakia had over two-thirds of upper secondary students following vocational tracks, whereas the three Baltic states had only around a third (the EU average was just over half).

For adults, a further measure is the number of working age people engaged in education or training. We noted in Chapter Five (page 105) that in many of the eastern countries this was comparatively low. Has the situation improved since accession?

Eurostat figures show that while in 2001 all of the eastern countries were at or below the EU average, by 2011 three of them (Slovenia, Estonia and the Czech Republic) had exceeded this benchmark. However, the other countries remained well below the EU average, with Romania and Bulgaria having less than a fifth (18 per cent and 13 per cent respectively) of the average EU incidence of learning on this measure (Eurostat, 2013a).

It would seem therefore that, at this macro level, the EU's influence could have done nothing more than prevent the VET situation in the East from getting worse, rather than materially enhancing VET. It is also clear that the outcome has been very different across countries. This would indicate a relatively weak effect of EU intervention on VET participation. If the effects had been strong, we would surely have seen greater conformity between countries because, as we have noted, the EU's prescription was similar in

all the countries. Nevertheless it is possible that, in the case of initial VET, the EU helped to stop what might otherwise have been a severe slide as a result of the forces of transition in many countries, and, in the case of the propensity to learn later in life, it may be fair to claim that the effects of the EU's efforts have not yet had time to work through into the behaviours of firms and individuals; most would acknowledge that lifelong learning involves fairly profound cultural shifts in attitudes to learning.

It is undoubtedly too soon to say which of the regional models of lifelong learning presented by Green (2006) apply to eastern Europe, or whether indeed they could be said to constitute a distinctive regional model. The tendencies towards centralization, comprehensive primary and secondary schools, and a fairly weak propensity for adult vocational learning shown by many of the countries would seem to put them in Green's 'southern European' camp. It seems unlikely that any will develop a strong enough apprenticeship system to put them in the same grouping as the German-speaking countries. Within VET – as we have seen – elements of the Anglo-Saxon orientation seem to have taken root, though it would be fair to remark that those roots are definitely shallow. Certainly Estonia is showing signs of joining the Nordic grouping, and it would not be surprising if this also in time applied to Latvia and perhaps Lithuania.

Given the variations in participation noted above, it may well be that we shall see a divergence in systems amongst the eastern countries with each finding it most natural to align to the existing regional groupings of their neighbourhood, though certain features of the common communist inheritance, and the common experience of accession, can be expected to be traceable for some time. Green, Wolf and Leney (1999), writing about convergence and divergence in education systems of the established member states during the period we are interested in, comment that while pressures and policy objectives have been similar in different countries, nevertheless the details of reform pathways have been divergent. In the case of the eastern European countries, we have in fact noted some similarities in the reform pathway while they were subject to close monitoring by, and aid from, the EU. However, now that this period of intervention is at an end, there are signs that divergences are re-emerging.

## EU integration theory

In Chapter Two four different theories about the forces which determine the development of the European Union as an integrated political entity were presented: neo-functionalism, inter-governmentalism, social constructivism and political economy. We can now pull together the remarks that have been made in the various chapters about these theories of European integration. We are, of course, only dealing with the case of VET in the East, and it is perfectly possible that different forces will manifest themselves in respect of different issues and fields.

Two theories, those of liberal inter-governmentalism and political economy, seem to provide only weak explanations of what occurred.

Inter-governmentalism holds that the course of European events is largely dictated by the decisions of the various national governments pursuing their own interests and interacting with each other to strike bargains. In our story some episodes in the gestation of internal EU VET policy (Chapter Four) would seem to fit this description, notably:

- the blocking by national governments of 'excessive' EU intervention in VET in the 1980s (page 64);
- the four nation 'break through' in the field of higher education policy in the *Sorbonne Declaration* and *Bologna* which led to similar arrangements for VET under the *Copenhagen* process (page 67);
- perhaps both the strong presentation and subsequent weak implementation of the *Lisbon* agenda (pages 67 to 70).

Undoubtedly also it needed inter-governmental agreement to move from bilateral aid programmes for the East to ones co-ordinated and funded by the EU.

However, while the attitudes of the several governments plainly played a part at a few key moments in the evolution of EU VET policy, the inter-play of governments would seem neither to be able to explain the detail of policy across the EU or much about the interventions in the East. Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter Six (page 129), inter-governmentalism has problems in accounting for eastern enlargement at all, as so many of the established members stood to pay more into, or get less out of, EU budgets. And the advantages to established members in terms of trade could have been

gained through the 'association agreements' which fell short of accession. Moreover, there is little evidence of the active bargaining by the eastern countries that inter-governmentalism would predict. As we saw from the genesis of accession conditions in Chapter Six and the evidence of interviewees, many of these policies were instigated from outside. The ETF experience (eg. page 194) was that it was often hard to get policymakers in eastern countries to engage actively in shaping VET activities promoted by the EU.

At the 'micro' level, it does seem that various national models of VET were promoted, through aid projects, with certain governments being associated with some of the consultancy organizations which were active in *Phare* projects. The fact that the French did not play a big role (Chapter Ten, page 217) may well help to account for the durability of the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic 'curriculum package' which emerged in many projects. However, it is difficult to detect the deliberate activities of governments, as opposed to agencies and individuals with a commercial interest, in this spreading of national models. Such government-inspired activities as did take place tended to be on a bilateral basis, rather than utilizing the EU programmes.

At the macro level, there is also some appeal in the economic interpretation; that it is the forces of competitiveness and trade – rather than the interactions between nations – that have served to form and shape the European Union. We have seen, in Chapter Four, that it was concerns about economic competitiveness that spurred a focus on VET and lifelong learning in the early 1990s, and which reinforced it under *Lisbon*. Undoubtedly too, there was advantage to be had for western businesses in having access to comparatively low-paid, but reasonably skilled labour in the East, and therefore in measures to modernize skills in these countries, as advocated by the *European Round Table* (page 130). However, there is no evidence of involvement of these business interests in designing the intervention programmes or their participation in them. So while economic factors undoubtedly set the context and underpinned much of the EU's action – as, of course, they had done since the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957 – simply noting this fact does not of itself explain the nature of the interventions in VET.

There is an argument, surely, that the stance towards the East was much influenced by the economic settlement between the ‘varieties of capitalism’ maintained by Fioretos (page 23). We have noted that the promotion of employment protection and social dialogue – both key elements of the ‘social model’ – were significant features of the declared aims of accession negotiations (Chapter Six) and a constant point of pressure during the negotiations themselves (Chapter Eight). However, I would argue that what we are seeing here is not a new ‘settlement’ between economic forces resulting from the incorporation of the new East into the EU as might be predicted by this theory, but rather simply the wholesale transportation of a previously accepted model regardless of the particular circumstances of the East, or any new accommodation which resulted from the accession of so many countries. Attempts to *transfer* the model were a manifestation of something other than economics.

There is, though, another sense in which economic forces served as an integrating force. The very fact that the eastern countries were joining a Union which was founded on ideas of market-based trade meant that they needed to make profound departures from their previous economic systems. Because VET arrangements are, by their nature, bound up in the labour market and the economy more widely, this meant that VET in the eastern countries was bound to change and was likely to take on some of the characteristics of the established member states which were already subject to market disciplines. An example of convergence due to economic pressures is the emergence of an adult training sector rather similar to those in many other EU countries, where nothing similar had existed in the East before.

Arguably, though, this convergence would have taken place whether or not the eastern countries actually joined the Union – it was the transition to a market-based economy rather than accession which gave rise to these kind of pressures on VET. Moreover, as with inter-governmentalism, the economic explanations only seem to have relevance at the macro level, and cannot easily be invoked to account for the focus on mechanisms such as qualification frameworks, or the ‘curriculum package’.

What, then, of the school of commentators who see the EU as exemplifying the “global dominance of the neo-liberal policy paradigm” and who claim that its education policies are steered by a “late neo-liberal state of mind”



(Zarifis and Gravani, 2014, p.2). One response to this belief is to point to the paucity of references to market mechanisms in VET that we noted in Chapter Eight, and to the emphasis made by the EU authorities on governance through social partnership as part of the European Social Model (page 167). A pervasive neo-liberal ideology would surely have led to the opposite course – seeking to introduce elements of the ‘new public management’ into the public education services of the east, and seeking to diminish the role of trades unions and the amount of social protection.

But the *reductio absurdum* in response to this school is surely this: if the characteristics of a VET system overly influenced by neo-liberal sentiment is one in which VET is used to respond to the short-term needs of industries in a trading bloc obsessed with gaining technological competitive advantage; if this instrumentalism is cloaked by an emancipatory and apparently humanistic rhetoric designed to mislead a populace who are encouraged – through the repetitions of an ideologically derived ‘discourse’ – to believe that there is no realistic alternative to the existing hegemonic system; if curricular tracks in secondary education reproduce unequal social divisions; and if the hallmarks of such a VET system are a stress on work discipline and competence in an ordinary working context rather than the expansive development of independent and creative talents such that “...the individual's aspirations [are] secondary to the perceived or projected needs of the labouring, producing community” (Sultana, 2007, p.217); then surely this is an uncanny description of the eastern VET system in the latter days of communism as described by observers such as Castles and Wüstenberg (1979) in Chapter Three. One is forced, therefore, either to conclude that the communist system was an early example of the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism, or to concede that the ills described by this school (if indeed the ills are as they describe rather than rhetorical flourishes) can be caused by a wide range of social systems, ranging – it seems – from Soviet-era communism to the present day EU. The first conclusion seems ridiculous and the second simply vacuous.

The social-constructivist interpretation has evident force. We saw in Chapter Four (page 83) how technical collaboration within the EU had given rise to something of a community of VET experts operating across national boundaries. Moreover, eastern practitioners and policymakers were undoubtedly and increasingly drawn into European VET networks as

a deliberate act of policy, and many have claimed (including those from the East interviewed in Chapter Ten) that this involvement was a powerful motivating force in their adopting ideas and practice from the established member states. It was also the case that many in the eastern countries were open to, and indeed anxious for, influence from the West, representing the 'back to Europe' theme which held such great appeal (page 115). Many eastern countries eagerly took part in the new and distinctively European ventures which were launched as part of the *Copenhagen Process*.

However, the establishment of consensus and identification amongst policymakers and practitioners only takes us so far. It cannot easily explain the directive, planned approach under the 'open method of co-ordination' which was designed to make policymakers and practitioners uncomfortable, through being held publicly to account for progress towards targets, rather than to foster collegiality. And a constructivist interpretation would surely have predicted a positive reception for the *Phare* pilots and the 'curriculum package' which were designed to attract a critical mass amongst an informed domestic audience, but which in many cases failed to do so.

While not denying that constructivist factors acted as an important means of giving a common, EU-based identity to an initially disparate group of VET actors, EU VET interventions evidently acted in advance of such bonding having taken place and were not dependent on it. It may be more correct to see this process more as an effect of EU integration rather than as an explanatory factor for it.

So, while economic factors formed an undoubtedly important backdrop to VET developments within the EU and for the eastern countries undergoing transition to free markets, and while inter-governmental bargains were needed to produce significant policy breakthroughs, neither of these factors would seem easily to be able to account for the more day-to-day evolution of EU VET policy affecting the East. And while, at the individual level, the identification of important stakeholders in the East with the wider EU VET networks may have served to make certain reforms more durable than they might otherwise have been, such links seem to have been a tool of policy rather than an explanation of why it took the form that it did.

We are left, then, with the neo-functionalist interpretation which rests on an internal dynamic, holding that incremental change in the interests of, or consistent with the perceived missions of, the central EU institutions has an inexorable influence, and that actions in one sphere have a tendency to 'spill over' to others.

There is certainly a weakness in the neo-functionalist case. It should surely predict that the Commission staff concerned with education and training would have made the running in elaborating VET policy, both in the established EU and in respect of the new countries of the East. Yet, as we saw in Chapter Four, the first 35 years of the Union's existence, up until around 1990, saw only modest and halting expansions of EU competence and activity with respect to VET. Moreover, there would appear to have been a virtual absence of interest on the part of the Commission's education staff in developments in the East, at least until the early 2000s, as reported by our Danish interviewee at the ETF (page 215). While the first absence can be explained by the active hostility of many member states to an expanded education role (*i.e.* inter-governmentalism can play a blocking role which trumps the tendency for incremental change), the latter is less easy to account for.

On the other hand, there is strong and continuous evidence for a neo-functionalist interpretation. The constant probing by the Commission in the 1990s for an acceptable *entrée* for VET and lifelong learning policy (*cf.* Chapter Four, page 83), which finally arose at *Lisbon* and *Copenhagen*, is evidence of incrementalist pressures at work, finding the line of least resistance to come through to the surface. The *Copenhagen* instruments, such as the EQF and *Europass*, were hardly epoch-making for VET in Europe, but they did guarantee a continued role for the central institutions, and opportunities for them to consolidate their networks of national technical experts. The commitment of the new DG Enlargement to their mission (Chapter Six, page 116) not only overcame a considerable number of obstacles and setbacks on the road to accession, but also helped to fill a vacuum on VET policy towards the East (page 225). The decision to establish the European Training Foundation gave rise to a new institution which evolved its role from running projects to helping to design and monitor them and providing authoritative reports on countries' progress. The use of external specialists to design and work within *Phare*

programmes represents an essentially technocratic approach, as does the support for the establishment of apolitical VET agencies within the eastern countries (Chapter Eight, page 158).

We can, in particular, see a number of examples of the concept of 'spillover' at work. The opening afforded by *Bologna* in the field of higher education was carried over to VET in the *Copenhagen* process. The 'open method of co-ordination' first embodied in the European Employment Strategy was extended both to the wider field of education and training under *Lisbon* and – as we saw in Chapters Six and Eight – to the accession negotiations with the eastern countries. Within the *Phare* programme, particular approaches, such as the curriculum package, were replicated from one project to another (Chapter Nine page 178, and the evidence of the British consultant, page 206). Perhaps, as noted above (page 235), there was even some 'reverse spillover' in transporting the outcome-based VET approaches promoted by the new breed of international VET consultants into mainstream EU thinking.

So while neo-functionalist interpretations cannot account for the relatively few strategic decisions which gave rise to new directions in EU VET policy – which were the result of inter-governmental bargains and dynamics of relative power, sometimes in turn influenced by the changing economic climate – they do seem to provide a good explanation of the *meso* level evolution of policy, following an evolutionary path of least resistance accompanied by persistent pressure from within the EU institutions. The picture, at least as far as VET in the East is concerned, would seem to be that the climate and constraints of decisions were very often the result of economic factors, and that occasional *démarches* and a continuing licence to act were the result of changing inter-governmental equilibriums. However, the precise course of policy appears to have been largely a result of internal institutional forces, heavily influenced by technocrats within the EU institutions in collaboration with their counterparts in member states and 'street level' associates in technical consultancy. This network evolves and reinforces itself, absorbing new members as new issues, and new member states, emerge.

## Reflections on methodology and methods

The main methodical approach used in this thesis has been that of a historical narrative, though taking the various strands separately rather than following a strict chronology. My aim has been to show how elements – the inheritance from the formerly socialist East, the gradual evolution of EU VET policy as it applied to the established member states, the pressures of economic transition, and the process of enlargement – combined to give rise to a distinctive policy towards VET in the East. To supplement the narrative I have also used other methods; a documentary analysis with quantitative results in Chapter Eight, and extracts from interviews with representative participants in Chapter Ten. These supplementary methods were intended, respectively, to ground at least one aspect of the study in hard evidence, and to incorporate some personal perspectives about particular issues which were not easily answered from documentary sources.

In all, I think that this balance of methods has been satisfactory in establishing what the EU's policy was and in accounting for why it took the shape that it did. It is less satisfactory in answering the rather separate, and admittedly more difficult, question of what the *effects* of the EU's policy were. To address this would have needed some kind of counter-factual case (*i.e.* what VET policies in the East would have been *without* the influence of the EU), which would be difficult to establish. However a case-study approach, attempting to track the effects of some major EU VET projects and pressures brought to bear in accession negotiations in specific countries, might shed some light on the extent to which the EU's influence brought about specific changes.

Turning to the individual methods used, I had hoped originally to gain access to the terms of reference of a large number of EU VET projects. I had originally envisaged conducting some in-depth analysis – on the lines of that performed in Chapter Eight on the regular monitoring reports – in order to identify common items within projects. Although I have a number of examples of these terms of reference from various sources, these are not published, and my enquiries at the ETF indicated that, though there was no objection to my examining them, they were scattered across the

various country files and it would clearly be a major job to assemble them.\* However fortunately there had already been some meta-analyses of the common themes in projects (Baumgartl, Strietska-Illina and Schaumberger, 2004; Masson, 2003; Parkes et al., 1998; Viertel, 1994), on which I was able to draw. I had also hoped that there might be some kind of inventory of the various consultants who had worked on projects which would enable one to establish which countries were dominant, but it seems that this too could only be established painstakingly, if at all, by going through the records of each project.

Though I have instanced a number of evaluations of projects in Chapter Nine, I was disappointed that a larger set of studies was not easy to access. It may be that they are held at the ETF or within the European Commission, and some are certainly accessible through *ad hoc* web searches, but the collection stored on the DG Enlargement website (DG Enlargement, 2012), is very limited and is mainly restricted to broad-brush evaluations of the whole *Phare* programme in particular countries or by major theme (not including vocational education and training).

However I was able to undertake a quantitative analysis on the regular monitoring reports (Chapter Eight). With the benefit of hindsight I need not, perhaps, have gone through every report on each country each year. I suspect that taking four or five countries, or perhaps every second year, would have halved the work-load without affecting the results greatly. But it was not until I was well into the exercise that I began to sense that the reports were very similar, and indeed it was that similarity which was the major finding, indicating that the EU stance was not much dependent on the different conditions in each country. *Nvivo* was an invaluable tool in this task, enabling me both to give a numerical account of the frequency of references to particular themes, and readily to instance examples of these references. Its 'Query' function allowed cross-tabulation and the narrowing down of particular types of reference.

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\* A collection of the 'programming documents' for past *Phare* projects are available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/former-assistance/phare/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/former-assistance/phare/index_en.htm), but these only describe VET projects in broad terms.

Turning to the interviews themselves, I believe that their strengths include a rapport as a colleague or informed fellow-professional which enabled me to follow up points of interest with some focus. I was also pleased to have been able to include a good range of nationalities, though deciphering distinct accents and idiosyncratic use of English did pose some challenges during transcription. I allowed a few interviews to run on too long, and in some places was irritated, when transcribing, to hear the sound of my own voice rather more than it should have featured.

Undoubtedly the study would have benefited from one or more interviews with key staff in DG Enlargement. I did not have contacts there, and I felt it would be something of a 'shot in the dark' to try to identify people who had been in post 15-20 years ago, but no doubt with perseverance I could have uncovered a candidate or two. As it happened, but certainly through luck rather than good judgement, one of my ETF interviewees (ETF Dk, page 215) had worked in DG Enlargement at the critical time and was able to shed some interesting light on their approach. It is also the case that my other interlocutors from the ETF had had considerable contact with DG Enlargement over the years, and indeed had played a part in influencing the main thrusts of policy in respect of its stance towards VET.

Throughout the study I was very much indebted to *Endnote* as my constant companion, not only to store and format my references, but also enabling me to search for themes. As well as a 'library' of documents, I built up a further Endnote library of some 700 quotations as I worked my way through the various documents. Some appear in this study, but collectively they have had an unintended use of enabling me quickly to see a spread of comments on a particular theme, or readily to review those items from a particular book or document which had struck me as significant while I was reading it. I certainly would not have been able to distil my reading through the 'intermediate' technology of extracts on index-cards that I would have otherwise have been inclined to use.

### **Suggestions for further research in the field**

As I have indicated, interesting further research might profitably be undertaken on the longer-term effects of certain prominent *Phare* development projects – such as the Slovenian and Bulgarian examples

cited in Chapter Nine (page 184). And it would be illuminating to undertake work on the provenance and role of foreign consultants, particularly to investigate which eastern countries might genuinely be said to have been influenced by which western models; the taxonomy quoted by Parkes *et al.* (Chapter Nine, page 182) may have been superseded by subsequent events, and no doubt could be added to. It would be interesting, too, to establish whether links between 'related' countries have been maintained.

It would also be interesting to establish the career trajectories of key national staff who had been involved in *Phare* projects. There is anecdotal evidence (*cf.* in Lithuania, page 185) that personal careers may play an important role in the transmission of even apparently unsuccessful innovations into a 'second round' effect. This effect may also arise from the subsequent careers of project staff who acted as 'local experts' (*cf.* the evidence of TL UK – page 193). If this is the case there might well be profit in agencies such as the ETF and EU Delegations keeping in touch with such individuals after projects have finished.

At a broader level, comparative analyses of VET in a number of the eastern countries would be of great interest. These countries have shared much in common, notably a fairly unified communist VET tradition, similar transition pressures and, as we have shown, remarkably similar treatment during the process of accession to the EU and no doubt since they became members. However we saw earlier in this chapter (page 236) that participation in VET, both at secondary level and amongst the population of working age, has diverged considerably between the countries. Although there are accounts of the different systems in the eastern countries, notably Kogan (2008), I am not aware of a penetrating analysis as to why one country might differ from another. Given their similar starting points, any effects of varying historical trajectories, or very different external factors, would seem likely to be very limited, and so domestic pressures, political climate, the re-emergence of regional influences (page 237 above), or simply the choice of domestic policymakers would be likely factors to account for the later divergences.



## Implications for policy

It was not the intent of this study to undertake a critique of policy, rather merely to identify and account for it. Nevertheless certain pointers for attempts to influence and support VET in a climate of EU accession, or perhaps even looser international association, can be gleaned from what we have examined.

First, we have endorsed Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's thesis that conditionality is more powerful than support as a means of inducing change (page 228 in this chapter). Without suggesting that conditionality should be the only means of encouraging change, it would be wise to use the two methods together and, in co-ordination with each other in a mixture of hard-headed negotiation on the one hand and support on the other, (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979). This 'force and support' strategy was occasionally manifested in our story (for example when accession negotiators stressed the importance of adult training for active labour market measures, while *Phare* projects gave advice on how to institutionalize the new sector), but it does not appear that such a strategy was always carefully orchestrated. For example, the lack of references to the virtues of the 'curriculum package' in the accession negotiations must have seemed odd to countries when they found this approach being strongly promoted in EU-supported *Phare* projects.

Evidence from the interviews (eg. the Hungarian consultant, page 205) indicated that the development of *Phare* terms of reference could be a rather hurried business set against a backdrop where domestic policymakers did not have the capacity to enter into meaningful negotiations about the support they needed (Danish ETF official, page 194). The result was often a rather standardized specification for a project (UK Consultant, page 206). Given the importance of securing the backing of domestic policymakers (page 186), it would seem wise to spend rather more time and effort than seems to have been the case during the period covered by this study, in negotiating the content of projects and ensuring that domestic policymakers are prepared to take an active interest in, and be associated with, their successful execution. If, as seems not uncommon, such commitment is not forthcoming then it would seem prudent not to progress with the project, as success is unlikely.

Abandoning scheduled projects for this reason should be seen as money saved, rather than an opportunity missed.

More time and deeper negotiation in the preparation phase might also help with the identification of potential internal champions for VET reform, who are not only an important ingredient for the success of projects, but who also can become influential catalysts for change in the future. Identifying such people and taking steps to groom them for future roles (through, for example, progressive insertion in a series of projects, personal study visits, invitations to conferences *etc.*) is likely to be effective in promoting a reform agenda.

Finally, we have noted how the 'international' consultants on *Phare* projects have, inevitably, developed and promoted their own ideas of VET reform. The 'curriculum package' seems largely to have been generated by these consultants rather than arising from deliberate policy of the ETF or DG Enlargement. As Lipsky (1979) points out, those engaged in implementation will inevitably have agendas of their own, which need to be taken into account. One reaction might be to seek to control and repress such 'hi-jacking', but it would seem more constructive to seek to understand and work with it. For example one could promote interchange between consultants, through occasional conferences and consultations, and encourage more interplay between the ETF and project personnel. The treatment of the cadre of consultants as a serious player in its own right, rather than as series of contractors who are only concerned with fulfilling project specifications, would recognize the reality of the matter and enable the EU agencies to shape the thinking of this significant resource.

In these ways one might arrive at a rather less mechanical and more co-ordinated programme of influence over VET, whereby government-level negotiations, reform-minded domestic policymakers and well-briefed external consultants were all acting to reinforce each others' efforts.

### **Contribution of the thesis**

I believe that this thesis has made an original contribution to the literature on the EU's policy on vocational education in a number of ways.

In the first place it has, for the first time, given a unified account of the origins and development of the EU's policy on vocational education as it applied to the enlargement of the Community to eastern Europe. While there have been partial accounts, notably Masson's (2003), none has presented a picture of the trajectory since before the fall of communism until the point of accession to the EU, and attempted to marry the parallel tracks of the impact of development aid and the pressures of the accession negotiations. This perspective has allowed us to track the shifting directions of the EU's policy and has allowed insights into what was driving the policy at different points of time.

By tracking the policy trajectory, the thesis has given strong indications that it was developments internal to the EU – rather than the external context of the transition economies – that best explains the shifts in policy that took place. In turn, this internal dynamic provides evidence for a neo-functional interpretation of the forces that shape European integration, at least in analyzing the reasons why particular policies took the shape that they did. The EU's emphasis on developing institutions involving social partnership and the promotion of a technocratic approach to educational planning would seem to weigh significantly against interpretations that the EU, as a supra-national institution, has been increasingly wedded to 'neo-liberal' views of the place of VET in a globalized economy.

The findings about the nature and origins of the 'curriculum package', which was applied to eastern Europe through the *Phare* programme in the 1990s, indicate that events in VET in the East pre-dated the application of these precepts in the wider EU context in the early 2000s. The current interest in outcome-based vocational education pedagogy and curriculum design in the East may not simply be a result of the encouragement of this kind of thinking through instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework, but be as much due to the revival of ideas which active eastern practitioners were introduced to at a formative point in their transition from communist ways.

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## GLOSSARY

<i>Acquis communautaire</i>	The total legacy of EU law applying to member states, as it stood at any given point in time. Comprised of EU Treaties and Directives together with Court interpretations of them. The 'soft' <i>acquis</i> refers to items of EU practice which are the subject of collective agreement rather than strict law.
Active labour market measures (ALMMs)	Programmes, usually co-ordinated by National Employment Services, designed to encourage and enable unemployed people to return to work quickly. Contrasted with 'passive' measures such as paying unemployment compensation or encouraging withdrawal from the labour force.
CEDEFOP	The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. A long standing EU-funded agency concerned with promoting co-operation in VET, mainly through research, networking and information activities. Based in Thessalonika since 1995, and before that in West Berlin.
CEE(C)s/New Member States	A variety of terms are used to denote the 10 ex-communist countries joining the EU in 2004-7. There is no wholly accepted term. Though Cyprus and Malta joined at the same time as the ex-communist countries, they are not often referred to in the same groupings.
Copenhagen Process	A series of collective policy statements about VET priorities made by education ministers of European states, starting in Copenhagen in 2002. Policies and progress are reviewed every two years. As well as national actions, the Copenhagen process has led to the development of EU-wide 'instruments', notably the European Qualification Framework, ECVET for credit transfer between VET systems, and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training. The term connotes the sector of VET which concerns training for adults. This might apply to those who have already undertaken training for a trade/profession during a period of IVET, and who either wish to upgrade this, or to switch to a different occupation (re-training). It may also apply to those adults who have, for whatever reason, not undertaken IVET and wish to train for the first time.

ETF	The European Training Foundation. Concerned with promoting European approaches to vocational education, training and employment measures in countries which are candidates for accession or which are otherwise aided by EU funds. Monitors country VET issues, advises on projects to support VET and convenes conferences and groups to explore relevant topics, but no longer undertakes major aid projects itself.
European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	An instrument devised under the Copenhagen Process for comparing qualifications offered in one country's VET system with those in another system. It operates through a series of generic descriptors of increasing educational and occupational demand over eight levels. Is expected to be operated through countries 'referencing' their national qualifications frameworks (which in some cases are being for the first time devised for this purpose) to it - hence its description as a 'meta-framework'.
European Social Model	A loosely defined concept whereby market forces are tempered through regulation to ensure a degree of employment protection and rights, health and unemployment insurance, equality of opportunity in the labour market, and decision-taking through collective agreements amongst the 'social partners'. The intention is to balance economic growth with 'social justice'. It was manifested in the <i>Maastricht</i> 'Social Chapter/Charter' which gave explicit provision for the EU to legislate in this area.
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training. The term connotes that part of VET which is concerned with the first establishment of skills relevant to a working career, usually in some particular trade or profession, or plainly preparatory to such training. It sometimes includes relevant parts of higher education, though is not used in that sense in this study. Generally IVET students are aged between 14 and 25.
Learning Outcomes/ Competences	Expressions of what an individual should know or be able to do after a period of instruction in VET. Often contrasted with a 'traditional' VET approach whereby syllabuses of what should be taught are devised. Learning outcomes in VET are usually agreed with the relevant industrial sector and may be used either as the basis for devising a scheme of instruction or for assessing individuals directly, or both.
Lisbon Agenda/Process/ Strategy	A series of targets relevant to EU-wide competitiveness agreed in the Lisbon summit of 2000, and followed up in subsequent years through the 'open method of co-ordination'. Following a number of adaptations and re-launches the current version (dating from 2012) is 'Europe 2020'.

Modularization	The construction of a programme of instruction or scheme of assessment from a number of self-contained sections, allowing flexibility and choice in the selection of what is taught or the description of what has been achieved. The modules may be termed 'units', though this term is sometimes reserved for staged assessments, rather than for periods of instruction. Modules/units can be aggregated towards a larger course or qualification through 'credit accumulation' according to protocols known as 'rules of combination'.
NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications. A UK initiative to modernize vocational qualifications in the 1980s, building on earlier reforms in Scotland. It involved learning outcomes, through occupational standards, modularization, and a qualifications framework of different levels. Though they still exist, NVQs never fulfilled the original aim of substituting for other forms of vocational qualification.
Occupational Standards	A particular form of learning outcome, devised through analyzing the detailed demands of particular occupations (often through a process known as 'functional analysis'). Usually formally agreed by sectoral bodies. Used to design VET programmes, and sometimes for the direct assessment of individuals.

## ANNEX A: FULL CODING RESULTS FOR EU REPORTS

Theme	Sub-category level 1	Sub-category level 2	No of References*
Decentralization			139
	Delegation to social partners		70
	Looser regulation		5
	Regional-local authorities		44
	School independence		12
Directives			105
	Chapters		11
	Mutual recognition		91
Europeanization			466
	Copying West European patterns		47
		Apprenticeship	19
		New Teaching Methods	12
	European Social Model		126
	Market models		30
	Mobility measures		1
	Participation in EU initiatives		255
		ESF	84
		Lisbon and associated	10
		Projects	57
	Reversion to pre-communist forms		5
Lifelong Learning			192
	Adult Training Sector		79
		Regular school involvement	9
	Employability-Competence		1
	Employer Training		34
	Government as promoter		6
	Individual Responsibility		6
	Lisbon		4
Modernization			424
	Bureaucracy		17
	Curriculum reform		96
		Broader profiles	16

Theme	Sub-category level 1	Sub-category level 2	No of References*
		Customization of curricula	4
		Employer and stakeholder involvement	45
		Increased general education	6
		Modularization	17
	Employability skills		19
		Enterprise Education	8
	Equipment		23
		ICT	12
	Responsive to individuals		38
		Counselling	26
	School Network		43
		Rationalization of profiles	4
		Vocational HE	14
	Skills mismatch-LMI		87
		Updating	25
	Teacher Training (VET)		33
Transparency			488
	Apolitical governance		33
	Data, Research & Classifications		34
	Formal qualifications		85
		Qualifications Frameworks	12
		Recognition of non/informal learning	19
	Legislation		57
	Levels		9
	Open planning		177
		JAP or NAPE (Employment Strategy)	107
	Outcome based		9
	Quality Assurance		39
		Assessment	17
		School inspection	1
	Standards of training		43
		Occupational Standards	19
Active Labour Market Policies			103

Theme	Sub-category level 1	Sub-category level 2	No of References*
Machinery of Government			33
Social Inclusion			121
	Gender issues		5
	Minorities-Disadvantage		99
	Regional disparities		17
Whole system issues			175
	Drop out		25
	Financing		65
	Increased HE		18
	Participation in Sec Ed		22
	Progression to HE		9
	Status of VET		21
	Volume of VET		15
Policy status			906
	Approval		243
	Capacity & co-ordination		178
		Non implementation	46
	Criticism		237
	Planned development		55
	Recommendation		193

\*Figures for higher level categories include those in relevant lower level categories

## ANNEX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*The following is an example of the sheet given to interviewees around a week before the interview and re-presented to them at the beginning of the interview itself. The questions posed were similar in each case, though varied slightly to reflect the likely experience and perspective of the interviewee.*

With your permission, I shall record the interview. I would like to be able to quote passages in my thesis, but would do so anonymously, using the title 'Team Leader for PHARE projects in Eastern Europe'.

My focus is the events concerning VET leading up to the accession of Eastern European countries. My main interests in the interview are:

1. Projects generally have detailed terms of reference. How appropriate are these in relation to the problems that face VET in the country(ies)?
2. Describe the process for bidding for a project. To what extent does the bidding process ensure that the best team and ideas are selected?
3. In practice, what room for manoeuvre are projects given in adapting their activities to the problems that need to be addressed? Are they given too much/not enough freedom?
4. How critical for success are:
  - (a) the agencies of the EU which fund and monitor the project;
  - (b) the ETF;
  - (c) the local officials/policymakers with whom one needs to interact;
  - (d) foreign experts deployed in projects;
  - (e) local experts deployed in projects.
5. Projects seem to include various elements, typically resources for buildings/equipment, training of staff, adaptation of curricula/qualifications/profiles, advice on policy, study visits *etc.* Would you single out any as being more effective than others?
6. How important do you think is the national background of the foreign experts (as opposed to their personal qualities)?
7. To what extent do you think that local policymakers, stakeholders and heads of schools/colleges feel they can influence their own participation. Is their cooperation a matter of helping to further their own objectives or a matter of 'toeing the line'?