



ΣΕΒ



**Conference 'Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications:
Roles and Responsibilities'**

23 – 24.5.2003, Athens

CONCLUSIONS

Organised jointly by the European Training Foundation, Cedefop, the Federation of Greek Industries, and the Greek General Confederation of Labour, under the auspices of the Greek Presidency of the EU.

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CONCLUSIONS

The conference was organised jointly by the European Training Foundation, Cedefop, the Federation of Greek Industries, and the Greek General Confederation of Labour, under the auspices of the Greek Presidency of the EU.

The main objective was to raise awareness and stress the importance of the issue of lifelong development of competences and qualifications of the workforce between the member states of the EU and the candidate countries as crucial in achieving the Lisbon European Council strategic goals and making *Europe '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'*.

Furthermore, the conference aimed at highlighting the role and responsibilities of all actors involved in society in promoting lifelong learning, in particular the state, the enterprises, the social partners and the individuals themselves.

The discussions and the presentations in both the plenary and the working group sessions meant to share information, experiences and good practice concerning the level of progress European member states and candidate countries are making on the topic of development of competences of their workforce.

The conference was attended by 83 participants including government officials (Ministries of Education and Labour/Social Affairs) and social partner representatives from the thirteen candidate countries, the Greek EU Presidency, a number of officials and experts from EU member states, the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, international organisations (OECD, ILO), European employers and employee organisations (UNICE, ETUC, CEEP).

A summary of the conclusions drawn during the discussions is as follows:

General conclusions

- The conference provided the opportunity to initiate the discussion with social partners from candidate countries on the key priorities of the Framework of actions agreed in 2002 between the European social partners.
- Lifelong learning is still far from being a reality for all and there's even a growing gap in learning opportunities between those with low skills and the higher educated ones, between younger and older age groups.
- The multi-dimensional character of Lisbon strategy calls for comprehensive approaches in which the lifelong learning and competence development should be integral elements of a wider policy, closely interrelated with the

issues of economic development and performance, employment promotion, quality of work, social inclusion;

- The use of national tripartite structures as a predominant platform for social dialogue has offered only a limited potential in terms of promoting in practice the concept of responsibility sharing. In fact the experience of the transition process in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrates that in most cases governments have kept a leading role in setting the agenda of these structures while the possibilities for social partners to have through them an effective influence on the policy making process have remained rather marginal. This situation should be linked with the still important deficit in many countries of autonomous social dialogue at sector and plant levels.
- There is a need to invest more and invest more efficiently in human capital and in providing opportunities for lifelong learning. This must be a priority in order to meet the constantly changing demands for a skilled and adaptable workforce.
- The governments, the enterprises, the social partners and the individual should all recognise competence development for all is a matter of shared responsibility.
- An effective cooperation between national governments, the social partners, local authorities and actors (e.g. employment agencies, training institutions, civil society organisations) and European institutions is required to promote and improve the quality of the skills' upgrading of the workforce.
- Better policy coordination between educational and labour administrations is an important challenge in all countries.
- The educational and training systems of all European countries have to go through substantial adaptations in order to meet the demands of the on-going changes of the labour market and bridge the gap of the mismatches between supply and demand in skills in the economy of knowledge.
- Basic, personal, and social skills are required to equip individuals for their better occupational and geographical mobility. Initiative-taking, problem-solving, learning how to learn, entrepreneurship, team-working are some of the core skills to be integrated in the basic education and initial training system.
- Firms have a major role in creating an appropriate learning environment at the workplace (through *the introduction of modern forms of work organisation and: deleted*) by making competence development a constituent part of their human resource and business strategies. Firms can equally contribute to preserving and improving the employability of their staff notably by facilitating access to competence development opportunities for all employees *for changing requirements on the job*.
- Public authorities and social partners are well placed to develop policy frameworks with the aim to stimulate, through suitable mechanisms and tools (e.g. co-investment approaches, schemes to validate competences acquired through professional experience, etc.) a higher and more efficient investment in skills and qualifications as well as to promote a more equitable access to

learning opportunities for all (workers in SMEs, older workers, low-skilled, temporary staff).

- Individuals need to be supported and empowered to play a more active role in the management of their competence development and employment prospects.
- Embedding a new pattern in the division of roles and responsibilities between various actors in the candidate countries would require a shift from consultation to action oriented partnerships whereby social partners will be fully involved both in the formulation and implementation of competence development policies. Encouraging such practices could help develop a concrete agenda for social dialogue at those levels where the latter is poorly developed while at the same time would help bridge the frequently observed gap between what is discussed at national level and the actual implementation on the ground.
- The consolidation of a culture of dialogue and responsibility sharing, besides requiring a substantial strengthening of the representative capacities of social partners in most candidate countries, is in itself a learning process which all key actors have to go through. Increased opportunities for cooperation and sharing of experience and knowledge between social partners at European level can assist the building up of such a culture. European agencies such as Cedefop and ETF are ready to continue playing a facilitating role in this exchange and mutual learning process (including through the systematic collection and dissemination of information on LLL good practices).

The working groups

Through the various discussions that took place in the three Working groups interesting conclusions were drawn concerning needs, gaps and weaknesses. The working groups were organised under three topic-titles and were structured along the lines of the priorities that the European social partners find crucial for the implementation of the lifelong development of competences in their 'Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications'. These were namely: 1. Mobilising resources/Investing efficiently in competences and qualifications, 2. Analysis/Anticipation of skill and Training Needs, 3. Guidance and Counselling.

Mobilising Resources/Investing efficiently in competences and qualifications

A need for more funds in training is a factor recognised by all member and candidate countries of the EU. *How can more funds be attracted and managed efficiently for training and retraining of employees and unemployed* is a key issue to be tackled by all stakeholders at each country. *What financial incentives will the governments provide equally to employers and employees and the individuals to invest in lifelong training?* Current policies in effect in different countries have shown

gaps and deficiencies. Three case studies were presented by Belgium, Poland and Hungary leading to a general debate and the following conclusions:

- The resources allocated to lifelong learning are often raised through contributions by enterprises and employees as stipulated by legal provisions.
- Resources are particularly insufficient when looking either at categories in danger of social exclusion or at SMEs.
- There are initiatives in candidate countries aimed at providing more resources, particularly for the training of employees, and state plays a major role in setting up proper mechanisms including national training funds and/or specific incentives. But state resources are limited and it is difficult to find the right balance) between state support to unemployed training and support to employees (Poland), between support to initial vocational training and support to employees training (Hungary), and also between state and private support.
- The effectiveness of measures depends on how truly efforts respond to national requirements and how flexible implementation is in place. It depends also largely on the quality of the training system. Therefore, modernisation of the VET system (including CVT) is a priority (Poland).
- Attracting companies and individuals towards investing in lifelong learning remains a difficulty in most countries due to lack of interest (older employees), lack of free time (self-employed) or resources (Sme's). But the high level participation of adults to evening courses (in formal education? you mean the high willingness of the individual to pay for courses?) reveals a strong interest of large categories for training and retraining (Poland).
- There is the need to envisage distinct arrangements and mechanisms for promoting investment in job related training and other forms of general training.
- Lifelong programmes are administered by central or local government bodies often without effective involvement of social partners although there are interesting initiatives to consider (Cyprus). Their level of bureaucracy is often deterrent to lifelong learning.

The existence of a proper accreditation system can contribute to enhancing the value and the efficiency of investment in lifelong learning.

Analysis/Anticipation of skill and training needs

Employers, as well as employees and their representative organisations are the primary sources of information and analysis on the changing business environment and its impact on the skills, knowledge and aptitudes needed by companies to survive, remain competitive and grow. They have continuously emphasised the need for the workforce to have a broad range of skills and competences beyond a narrow range of occupationally specific skills. Basic skills have been identified as a major priority for action at EU level. In addition, there is a general shift upwards in skill levels in most occupations as a result of the

global market and the knowledge economy. All these factors lead to the need of an ongoing process of anticipation of skills and training needs. *What needs to be done and how to do it*, is the key question that was raised through the presentation of case studies from Greece, the Czech Republic and France and the discussions, which followed. Key outcomes of this discussion are as follows:

- The social partners must be active in the field of anticipation of qualifications changes
- Competences in a given work situation must be recognised for each worker and considered in some cases equivalent to formal training
- The qualifications and training profiles must be defined in a broad way to assure mobility within the sectors and between sectors
- Initial education must provide a solid foundation for lifelong learning
- Each enterprise must make the development of its employees' competences a crucial issue
- Each employee must be adequately supported and motivated to manage the development of his/her competences

Guidance and Counselling

To promote lifelong learning, career information, guidance and counselling systems have to be further developed to provide a wide range of guidance functions to help all adults maintain and improve employability and flexibility to change. Currently career guidance services are provided mainly at schools or to the unemployed adult and tend to be remedial in nature. What is truly needed is a proactive approach addressing a wider group of individuals. Public authorities and the social partners could form closer links and partnerships to provide ways of promoting better access for workers and employers to information, guidance and counselling services in order to enhance occupation mobility, workforce upskilling, individual competence plans and corporate strategies. Different roles can be played and initiatives can be generated and implemented by the public authorities, the employers, the trade unions and community based organisations. The case studies presented by the UK, Latvia and Lithuania led to the following conclusions:

- Career guidance and counselling and its widely availability throughout the lifespan is crucial in achieving lifelong learning goals, meeting the needs of the labour market and promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion
- No country has yet developed a universal LL Guidance system capable of supporting a lifelong learning strategy and in all MS and candidate countries there are gaps in services for employed people who wish to change career direction or to improve their employment prospects
- The case studies have shown interesting initiatives in some countries to develop new career guidance services for adults, although most are still at an initial stage and remain at a small scale:

- Trade unions have been very effective in developing workplace guidance models aimed at disadvantaged groups, in particular low-paid and low-skilled workers (UK)
 - Pilot social partners' networks have proved to be highly efficient in the implementation of work opportunity programmes, including guidance for the long term unemployed (Lithuania)
 - Legislation has opened up free guidance services provided by public employment services to all adults (employed and unemployed) who demand them, but sufficient resources to meet the potential demand still need to be provided (Latvia)
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- FMS are facing many of the same challenges as EU MS (global competition, rapid changes in technology) but there are more restrictions on resources in candidate countries and sometimes structures (e.g. weak social partnership) makes it difficult to transfer good practice models from the EU. FMS have to take account of their distinctive economic, social and cultural features
 - Partnerships developed between education providers and the social partners can be very fruitful in making the educational institutions more responsive to the needs of the employees and the labour markets in general
 - Exchange of experiences and good practice between member countries and FMS are still highly needed and can lead to the development of networks of services that will help remove barriers and obstacles to information provision and increasing employability
 - With a view to more comprehensive career guidance services a systematic policy framework and appropriate financial models are yet to be developed. All players need to seek new and diversified sources of financing career guidance and counselling.

Roles and Responsibilities in the promotion of lifelong development of competences and qualifications

It has been widely recognised in this Conference that, in order to reach the goals of the European Union in the promotion of lifelong learning, there is an urgent need to *encourage partnerships between all actors involved to generate initiatives to improve the quality of the employees' skills.*

The *roles and responsibilities of the social partners* in policy formulation and in investing and providing learning opportunities and training become very important as well as effective as case studies in this conference have shown.

With their '*Framework of actions for the development of competences and qualifications*' they have taken a joint initiative and have already made progress implementing an action plan.

Recognising that investing in education and training can be a shared responsibility between governments, enterprises, the social partners and the individual, is a key issue to meet the challenge.

The governments' role

- Investing in basic education and initial training
- Cooperating with the social partners organisations for matching education with the future needs of the labour market
- Sharing the responsibility for investment at groups that run the risk of social exclusion
- Ensuring that education and training are accessible to all
- Creating an economic environment and incentives for enterprises and individuals to invest individually or jointly in education and training
- Developing a career guidance and counselling system accessible to all

The enterprise's role

- Making the workplace a major source of Lifelong learning
- Main responsibility to train their employees
- Sharing the responsibility in initial vocational training of young people to meet their future needs

The individuals' role

- Managing (through adequate motivation and support) their own competence development
- Investing in their personal career development, supported by public and enterprise investment in lifelong learning

The social partners' role

- Strengthening social dialogue on training
- Sharing responsibility in formulating education and training policies
- Engaging in partnerships with each other or with governments for investing in, planning and implementing training
- Encouraging learning within enterprises
- Influencing training policies drawing attention to the need for long term investment in training
- Training their own members through their own institutions
- Promoting a learning culture among workers, including those who are not formally employed
- Ensuring access to broad-based and portable skills training to enhance mobility and prevent social exclusion