

**For a trade union version**  
**of the**  
***New Skills for New Jobs* initiative**

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**CENTRE ETUDES & PROSPECTIVE DU GROUPE ALPHA**





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## **In favour of a trade union version of the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative**

### **Introduction**

The *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative was launched via a Communication from the European Commission in 2008, with a view to evaluating skills needs up to 2020 and combining the response to these needs with the affirmation of a new industrial policy.<sup>1</sup> The stated purpose was to go beyond defensive restructuring measures, instead adopting a pro-active strategy of developing human skills and providing options for productive specialisation. The scope involved is wide and includes the development of human capital, sectoral redeployment, improving the quality of jobs and encouraging job changes.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), in conjunction with its affiliated sectoral unions, initiated a process of constructive criticism of the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative. The Alpha Group's "Centre Etudes & Prospective" (Centre for Studies and Forecasting), engaged for this purpose, went ahead with a review of the work and discussions underpinning this initiative, and with a survey of the sectoral federations to gather their points of view and the directions in which they are thinking<sup>2</sup>. This work became a source of information for a conference held on 2 - 3 September 2010 by the ETUC in Brussels to discuss various issues related to the initiative. The conference was also attended by representatives of European employers and the European Commission, as well as researchers and experts from different countries.<sup>3</sup> This document, which takes the conference contributions into account, gives trade unionists, along with all other interested parties, a synthesis whose principal purpose is to draw attention to key issues of the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative and to provide some tentative answers to these issues, based on the opinions expressed by the trade unionists surveyed.

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<sup>1</sup> *New skills for new jobs. Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs*, European Commission, COM(2008) 868 final, 16 December 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The team from the Alpha Group's Centre Etudes & Prospective, led by Jacky Fayolle, was comprised of Odile Chagny, Sonia Hacquemand, Mathieu Malaquin, Antoine Rémond, Natacha Seguin and Sabine Vincent. The survey of the sectors resulted in a specific summary document, *Résumé d'entretiens avec les fédérations syndicales européennes « Pour une version syndicale de l'initiative New Skills for New Jobs »* (Summary of interviews with trade union federations of the New Skills for New Jobs initiative), produced by the Alpha Group's Centre Etudes & Prospective in August 2010.

<sup>3</sup> cf. the conference programme in the Appendix. The conference proceedings are available on the ETUC website at [www.etuc.org/a/7616](http://www.etuc.org/a/7616)

## 1. Jobs and Skills: a European strategy still at an embryonic stage

### 1.1. Obstacles and major challenges

The crisis experienced in the years 2008 - 2009, the outcome of which remains under threat, has definitely confirmed that the results of the Lisbon Strategy are not going to live up to the hopes invested in this strategy in the early 2000s. The difficulties with this strategy, however, cannot be attributed solely to the shock of the crisis, as it was already becoming evident that the strategy was going adrift well before the onset of the crisis<sup>4</sup> :

- the lack of investment in R&D and training.
- the poor matching between sectors, jobs and skills.
- the deprioritizing of the objective of job quality as a key productivity factor.

Because these trends existed before the crisis, there is now the risk that the crisis may, in the absence of adequate reactions, lead to a deepening and cementing of the European weaknesses: short-term measures, taken under the pressure of the emergency both by companies (with priority given to reducing labour costs) and Member States (across-the-board cuts in public spending) may turn out to be counterproductive, hindering an offensive correction of these weaknesses.

The rise in unemployment, with major differences between European countries but very high in some of them, is not a spontaneous incentive to develop skills, felt less urgently when the overall labour market is not under pressure. However, the combined effects of demographic and economic changes in the current decade contain as many dangers as opportunities. In sectors where the crisis has led to long-term overcapacity and where the workforce is growing older, the risk of a silent and irreversible European industrial decline needs to be taken seriously - we risk seeing machines and workers going into retirement together. It is not a fatal scenario, but fighting it involves tackling the question of skill renewal and skill transfer between generations, in particular by making industrial trades more attractive to the young. This involves a lot more than just adapting workers to existing workplaces. As an example, the European chemical industry is clearly confronted by the following problem: if the industry does not make the occupations and careers it offers to young people more attractive, it will run the demographic risk of compromising its future, due to a lack of workers with suitable qualifications. Major chemical companies, aware of this risk, are putting a lot of effort into evaluating the problem and how it affects them, coming to the conclusion that they need a dynamic and well-balanced

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<sup>4</sup> All we have to do to convince ourselves of this is to look at the *Employment in Europe* reports, published each autumn by the European Commission, which often contain relevant and lucid analyses of the European weaknesses.

management of their age pyramids on a wider timescale. This integrated age management encompasses both recruitment and professional integration practices targeting young new-hires and the redefinition of workplaces filled by older long-standing workers<sup>5</sup>.

The crisis has therefore strengthened the need to clarify the agenda: *New Skills for New Jobs* has become one of the seven flagship initiatives proposed in the *Europe 2020* Communication from the Commission at the beginning of 2010<sup>6</sup>. But the language and method of this new 10-year strategy leave a lot to be desired. The open method of coordination (OMC), upheld in such areas as training, where national responsibility remains uppermost, has failed to foster the active commitment of national public and private players. To solve this methodology problem, we need more than just "bumper stickers" for smart and inclusive growth. The Lisbon Strategy is dead and the *Europe 2020* is still at an embryonic stage<sup>7</sup>.

However, awareness of the challenge facing European countries is becoming more widespread and more acute: the ability of these countries to actively take part in the new competitive and environmental configuration of the global economy is dependent on all workers having available suitable and upgraded skills. Whether European citizens can maintain their standard of living and quality of life depends on the response to this challenge. Yet there are visible obstacles needing to be cleared aside.

- Too many of today's workers are low-skilled. The crisis highlighted their vulnerability on the labour market when hit by a major shock, and the effects are still persisting. Though educational levels of younger generations are rising, it is no longer sufficient to just be a young European to have the top-level know-how and skills demanded in today's global economy: a number of European countries have low rankings in international comparisons of educational levels and performances<sup>8</sup>.
- the spread and growth of precarious employment in the course of the last decade are no incentive for developing skills, either on the part of

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<sup>5</sup> The conference on *Demographic Change in the European Chemical Industry*, co-organised by the ECEG, the EMCEF and the FECCIA (European employers and trade unionists in the chemical industry) and held on 23 - 24 September in Potsdam, was a testimony to the development of sensitive human resource practices targeting a fair intergenerational balance within a company and, in conjunction with this, the sustainment of personal capabilities and professional skills throughout individual careers.

<sup>6</sup> *Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, European Commission, COM(2010) 2020, 3 March 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative has been surreptitiously re-christened *New Skills and Jobs* by the European Commission (though it would seem that the French translation has not followed suite). We are retaining the original name here, further underscoring the need for innovation.

<sup>8</sup> For all these points, please refer to the presentation of Mike Campbell, a member of the *New Skills for New Jobs* expert group set up by the Commission, given at the ETUC conference on 2 - 3 September 2010, <http://www.etuc.org/a/7616>

employees or of employers. Young people in particular are worried by this strong trend towards precarious employment and work, often having difficulty finding employment. The measures taken by certain countries during the crisis to transform periods of short-time working into an opportunity for training can be seen as a positive form of flexibility in the face of this violent shock. But they remain a one-off reaction, not sufficient for making training a long-term instrument for safeguarding professional careers. The fight against precarious employment is a condition of the upskilling of each and every one, in the context of an inclusive labour market. The European social partners have reached agreement on the principles of this inclusive market and the responsibilities they bear in promoting respect thereof.<sup>9</sup>

Competition between companies and countries to attract talented people is one dimension of globalisation. Should this competition only lead to people with such talents becoming better paid, underlining the polarisation of the labour market, there will be no benefit at the end of the day either for lower-skilled workers or for the overall competitiveness of the European economy. A top priority is to achieve a balance between the promotion of centres of excellence in the fields of education and research, and the mobilisation of initial and continuing education systems to raise overall skill levels - without discrimination. Public and private training measures must work together towards a balanced strengthening and mobilisation of the capabilities of different generations, of women and men, of workers in large and small companies. People threatened by social exclusion, whether early school-leavers or low-qualified migrants, must not be excluded from this overall effort to upgrade skills. Social cohesion and economic effectiveness are at stake in European societies.

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<sup>9</sup> *Framework Agreement on Inclusive Labour Markets*, BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP, ETUC, UEAPME, 25 March 2010.

## **1.2. Joining forces: social dialogue and public policy**

The report of the expert group tasked by the Commission to draft a balanced and coherent action programme defines four paths of action<sup>10</sup>:

- The introduction of the right incentives for both individuals and employers to upgrade skills and make better use of them.
- Getting the worlds of education, training and work to work closer together.
- Developing the right mix of skills.
- Better anticipating future skill needs

The European trade union movement is giving these issues top priority, asking how to better equip workers for more frequent and more risky job changes. The upgrading of individual skills throughout our working lives is a key component of such equipping, helping to more secure careers and to greater optional mobility. This orientation encompasses all possible transitions:

- Initial entry into the labour market, influenced by the information and advice given to a pupil within the educational system and guiding his or her choice of career.
- The acquisition of initial professional experience.
- The switch from temporary or precarious employment to a long-term employment contract.
- Solutions helping workers when made redundant or losing their jobs.
- Access to training, thereby underpinning employability, especially with regard to older workers.

It is not a question of a simple individualistic orientation: the cohesion of all salaried workers is dependent on greater access of as many workers as possible to training, maintaining and developing their skills. This means that it is an issue for collective bargaining within companies and sectors. Workers in SMEs are currently at a disadvantage here, all the more so if they live in a country with a low overall level of investment in continuing training by companies. Those least equipped to start with are not the ones immediately benefitting from additional training during their working lives, with discrimination hitting women and migrants all too often. Equal rights to training, in particular via access to public funding and under the responsibility of employers, remain the exception.

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<sup>10</sup> *New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now. A report by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs*, European Commission, February 2010.

The obstacles in the way of such an orientation are not to be underestimated. They are not superficial obstacles, being anchored in the complex nature of what constitutes skills (cf. box). State policies and social dialogue need to take these obstacles into account in order to define realistic objectives and to introduce the right incentives for companies and individuals.

### **Skills: private goods or public goods?**

There is a strict theoretical definition of what constitutes public goods: they need to be non-rival and be non-exclusive.

**Non-rivalry:** the consumption of the goods by one person shall not reduce their availability for consumption by others.

**Non-excludability:** no one can be excluded from using the goods.

With reference to these definitions, skills represent "complex goods":

**– on the part of companies:**

- High, prolonged unemployment levels see companies becoming accustomed to accumulating skills cheaply, leading to a risk of workers being over-qualified for the work they are hired to do.
- Companies are reluctant about investing in any training likely to benefit their competitors.
- Companies are reluctant about making known their internal supply and demand of skills, if there is a possibility of such strategic information becoming available to their competitors.

Companies are tempted by the slogan - *the right skills at the right time*. This treats skills as private goods useable in the short term.

**– on the part of workers:**

Competences consist of knowledge and skills:

- embodied in a private way in individuals (factors influencing personal employability);
- embodied collectively within the work organisation (factors influencing a company's competitiveness).

Taking this complexity into account, one could say that the possibility of giving skills a "public good" dimension is dependent on:

- the right balance between specific skills (exploitable at a given workplace or in a given company) and transversal skills (exploitable in a whole range of jobs) in the individual mix of skills;
- the transferability of personal skills between companies, sectors, territories, enabling workers to expand their mobility scope and enabling companies to benefit from outside skills.

## 2. Sector Councils on Employment and Skills

### 2.1. A tool complementing sectoral social dialogue?

Seen in the light of issues raised above, the Commission's proposal to set up Sector Councils on Employment and Skills at EU level raises a moot point: the need for fora where social dialogue and public policies can interact in a positive way to optimise individual and collective skill development.

The feasibility report commissioned by the Commission from ECORYS provides a comparative review of institutions and existing practices in the twenty-seven EU countries<sup>11</sup>. Based on this review the authors make pragmatic recommendations for setting up such Sector Councils:

- The definition of realistic objectives and expectations.
- Reliance on the voluntary participation of stakeholders.
- Provision of temporary and conditional support by the Commission, on the basis of an agreement on objectives, a careful monitoring of progress and serious evaluation of results.
- Giving initial priority to the sharing of information between social partners.
- Networking national bodies with a view to forging best practice communities, in the knowledge that 22 Member States already have some form of council.

#### ***Typology of Councils for Employment and Skills in EU Member States (number of Member States in which they are found)***

	Sectoral		Transversal	
	IVET	CVT	IVET	CVT
National	11	8	10	9
Regional		--	8	--

**Source:** ECORYS, 2010. The acronyms IVET and CVT refer respectively to initial and continuing vocation training.

The pragmatic path proposed in the ECORYS report has been confirmed by the Commission. In a Staff Working Document of 22 July 2010 on the functioning and potential of European sectoral social dialogue, the Commission sets forth its point of view<sup>12</sup>. Calling for a new impetus in sectoral dialogue, it considers the field of

<sup>11</sup> *Sector Councils on Employment and Skills at EU level. A study into their feasibility and potential impact*, ECORYS, March 2010.

<sup>12</sup> *Commission Staff Working Document on the functioning and potential of European sectoral social dialogue*, European Commission, SEC(2010) 964 final, 22 July 2010.

employment and skills as a key area for such dialogue, with a view to helping formulate public policies. Its answer is the concept of Sector Councils on Employment and Skills, an instrument complementing social dialogue: "Taking part in sectoral skills councils can help social partners to get involved in joint actions with other partners as a complement to their autonomous dialogue" Once the social partners in a sector agree on a draft Council, the phase of identifying the players and organisations needing to be mobilised is seen as crucial by the Commission, coming in front of the launch itself. As this identification phase determines the quality of the external governance of such Councils, the Commission is making an initial budget available for its successful completion. The Commission is stressing the autonomous will of social partners to launch and subsequently manage the Councils; it nevertheless clearly sets forth its own vision of the Councils' missions, betting on the effects of emulation among sectors.

The European Economic and Social Committee also issued, in early 2010, an exploratory opinion on Sector Councils<sup>13</sup>. This opinion contains objectives more voluntary than the careful recommendations contained in the ECORYS report: in addition to sharing information and carrying out studies, the Councils would also be expected to issue recommendations for action and to launch corresponding programmes; they would to a large extent be open to stakeholders other than just the social partners; they would have a wider scope and a more autonomous role than the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees<sup>14</sup>.

## **2.2. Trade union points of view**

The team from the Alpha Group's Centre Etudes & Prospective surveyed the European sectoral trade union federations to gather their points of view on the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative and, in particular, on the proposal for Sector Councils. The federations' opinion of this proposal is summarised below<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> *Matching skills: sector councils on employment and skills*, CCM/068 – EESC 259/2010, European Economic and Social Committee, 17 February 2010

<sup>14</sup> To avoid both ambiguity and bulkiness, the rest of the text uses the term "Committees" or the acronym SSDC to designate existing sectoral social dialogue committees. The term "Councils" is used to designate the future Sector Councils on Employment and Skills.

<sup>15</sup> cf. additional document giving a detailed summary of these interviews: *Résumé d'entretiens avec les fédérations syndicales européennes « Pour une version syndicale de l'initiative New Skills for New Jobs »* (Summary of interviews with trade union federations on the New Skills for New Jobs initiative), produced by the Alpha Group's Centre Etudes & Prospective in August 2010. The following federations were surveyed using direct interviews: EFBWW, EFFAT, EMCEF, EMF, EPSU (Public Utilities), EPSU (Health and Social Services), ETF, UNI-Europa (Commerce), Uni-Europa (ICTS), ETUF-TCL.

The federations expressed common interest in the proposal, with a wide range of subtle differences. There is still a widespread feeling among trade unionists that employers are often more reluctant than unions to move forward in this direction, in particular because employers prefer to manage skills on a company level.

The trade union federations welcome the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative in the light of the challenges facing Europeans. In this context, the Sector Councils could become interesting **resource hubs** for:

- developing consistent forward-looking studies providing social partners with **operational** information.
- **networking** national councils and observatories to enable a fruitful sharing of experience.

At present, the levels of commitment in the process of setting up Sector Councils vary greatly from one sector to the next:

- Work is in progress in a number of sectors, as seen in the examples listed below (the list is not exhaustive, as the situation is in flux).
  - **Commerce:** the European social partners (UNI-Europa Commerce and Eurocommerce) held three regional workshops in the course of 2010 on anticipating skill needs and on vocational training issues in the commerce sector, also involving other players, especially from the area of training. A final conference, scheduled for 7 December 2010, will decide on what action is to be taken.
  - **Textiles, clothing and leather:** in this sector battling with a high level of competition, there is a long tradition of dialogue on forecasts, without it being easy to draw practical implications. The trade union federation would like to see more active discussions on solutions, and is currently involved in networking existing national institutions.
  - **Metalworking:** The process is currently at the stage of identifying the players concerned in the steelmaking and automotive sectors. Less progress has been made in the shipbuilding sector. Having employees gain new skills, their access to vocational training and incitements for the educational system are seen as crucial issues justifying joint initiatives with employers.
- The process is still at an embryonic stage in a lot of sectors, but progress is being made.

Beyond these commonalities and differences, there are further questions being raised among trade unionists:

- What is **the right sectoral scope** needing to be covered by one Council?

- is the scope **wide**, thereby encouraging the transferability of skills and individual employability (e.g. the whole *fashion industry*)?
  - or is it **limited**, thereby sticking to employment realities (e.g. several distinct sub-sectors in the metalworking industry)?
- What is **the right level of linkage with the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (SSDC)**? There is a consensus among trade unions that leadership of the Councils must be in the hands of the social partners. Even so, practical relations between the Councils and the SSDC remain in need of clarification, with an explicit necessity to avoid any bureaucratic overlapping and to look for complementary tasks. Are the Councils to be **independent** or are they to be **subordinated** to the Committees, with the latter playing a steering role in determining the Councils' work programme and supervising their work? At present the design is not yet clear.
  - What is **the right level of involvement of civic and social players** other than the social partners? A certain consensus would seem to exist on the involvement of vocational training institutions, inputting expertise and activities in this crucial area. But we need to tread carefully with regard to the involvement of other players, with trade unionists frequently questioning the legitimacy of such involvement and the representativeness of such players.

### **2.3. Mobilising know-how and experience available in the field**

These institutional questions naturally have a political dimension, and the right answers are needed to enable the Sector Councils to get off to a good start. The questions must not however lead to the primary mission of the Councils becoming deprioritized, as the latter have the potential to become a privileged forum for mobilising the field experience of social actors, especially trade unionists. The interviews conducted by the Alpha Group's team with the heads of the trade union federations uncovered a whole series of questions needing to be dealt with explicitly and openly:

- Economic globalisation is leading to a **standardisation of skills on a global level**. This in turn is making it easier for companies to relocate operations and contributing to the international segmentation of value chains via *outsourcing* and *offshoring*, with each business unit skilled in the segment it works in. However such know-how is not necessarily permanent and the situation can be reversed. The availability of specific high-level skills is likely to be a factor influencing the geographic location of business

operations: **individual creativity**, as an innovation factor, is not easily reproduced in an undifferentiated fashion somewhere else (for example, *knowledge workers* in ICT); **system-related skills**, i.e. the ability to design not just basic products but whole systems consisting of goods and services responding to customer expectations, favour the concentration of operations in local *clusters*.

- **The tension between the on-site development of workers' skills and the use of external providers** (through outsourcing or offshoring operations, or recruiting skilled non-EU workers) is to be seen in a whole range of business areas (ICT, public utilities, transportation, etc.). It is desirable that decisions between these different ways of mobilising skills are not governed solely by direct cost, but take into account the costs of training as an investment, fairly assessing progressive return effects<sup>16</sup>. The so-called sectoral approach to migration, establishing separate legal frameworks for different categories of migrants and workers, and the *Blue Card* directive on conditions of entry and residence of highly skilled workers adopted in May 2009, facilitate a utilitarian recourse to selective immigration. Such recourse can go against training measures targeting the low-skilled, people who have long been living on European soil, including those with migration backgrounds.
- **The interaction between an ageing workforce and the restructuring of industrial processes** is highlighting the issue of attractiveness of companies and sectors to new categories of manpower as a way of ensuring the long-term prospects of the business activities involved. These include young people entering the labour market for the first time, women gaining access to certain activities more easily, etc. Achieving the right work/life balance is a key factor in opening certain professions to women (ICT engineers, retail managers, etc.). Wages and working conditions and the quality of work are key factors for attracting skilled manpower into sectors with the potential to create jobs. This includes attracting more men into domains currently dominated by women, such as *social care*.
- The skill mix required in any given work is not just dependent on technical criteria, but is also influenced by **economic, organisational and institutional factors**: in healthcare by the role of the publicly financed sector; in social services by the professionalisation of *social care*; in the

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<sup>16</sup> The interactions between offshoring and skills were studied in the MOOS project (*Making Offshore Outsourcing Sustainable*) supported by the European Social Fund. Uni-Europa and CFDT officials were among the partners taking part in the project. See *Délocalisations, guide à usage syndical / Offshoring, guide for trade union usage*, MOOS, Uni-Europa, Brussels, September 2006.

banking sector by the type of changes in regulation in the aftermath of the crisis; in the retail trade and transportation, by the determinant impact of *business models*. The nineteen forward-looking sectoral studies, coordinated by the Commission and published in 2009, contain useful information and analyses in this respect, but they do not in the view of trade unionists always attach sufficient importance to certain sensitive parameters.

### 3. Forward-looking works and social dialogue

The work of the Sector Councils will have a forward-looking dimension. This is not new territory. Over the last few years, EU institutions have systematically worked on exploring the future dynamics of employment and skills. Two main sets of forward-looking studies are available on a European scale: the CEDEFOP forecasts and the sector surveys coordinated by the Commission. Comments are first made on the nature of this work, before examining their joint contribution to developing knowledge on the dynamics of employment and skills.

#### 3.1. The CEDEFOP forecasts

CEDEFOP makes quantitative forecasts on the supply and demand of jobs and skills on a country to country basis (involving the 27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland)<sup>17</sup>. These forecasts are broken down by sector (into 41 sectors in accordance with NACE, the statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community), by occupation (into 27 occupations in accordance with ISCO, the International Standard Classification of Occupations, and by qualification (in accordance with ISCED, the International Standard Classification of Education, using three broad levels of formal qualification<sup>18</sup>). The forecasts use complex econometric modelling and compare with work done by national teams using their own tools and methods. They provide useful information on the relationship between potential economic growth paths and the structural dynamics of employment and qualification,

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<sup>17</sup> Over the last few years, CEDEFOP has produced a number of publications underlining the gradual maturing of its forecasting methods and extending the range of results made available. For a fairly complete methodology, see *Future skill needs in Europe: Medium term forecast, Technical background report*, CEDEFOP, Publications Office of the European Union, 2009. For more recent results on both the supply of and the demand for skills, see: *Skills supply and demand in Europe: Medium-term forecast up to 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2010. All these publications are available on its website [www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)

<sup>18</sup> The bottom level of qualification covers ISCED levels 0 - 2 (up to the first cycle of secondary education), the middle level covers ISCED levels 3 and 4 (second cycle of secondary education and non-university post-secondary education), with the top level corresponding to ISCED levels 5 and 6 (higher education).

measuring in a summary fashion the overall imbalances between supply and demand for skills, and between the qualifications needed for jobs and the formal skills of individuals.

Each country shows specific coherences between several complex dimensions: the education system, industrial relations systems, company organisation. The CEDEFOP forecasts represent an ambitious project, though inevitably coming up against obstacles limiting the uncomplicated use of such forecasts in the context of social dialogue on a European scale:

- ***The standard classifications cannot be applied homogenously in all countries.*** Each country has its own classifications, anchored in national practices and designs. The international comparability of classifications as a means of characterising jobs in terms of occupations, through the ISCO, and of qualifications, through ISCED, therefore needs to be handled with care. Even if the base - the European Labour Force Survey - is the same, the coding of basic data gathered may differ from country to country.
- ***Any sound assessment of imbalances between supply and demand for skills requires both formal and informal skills to be properly reported.*** This is proving to be difficult within a homogeneous statistical framework. Transferable skills based on recognised vocational training courses and specific skills gained on the job are not always easily entered into such a common framework. Measuring the imbalance on any given type of skill, identified by crossing an occupation with a level of qualification, presupposes that supply and demand can be measured as correctly as possible: the "delta" between these two variables will point to the impact of measurement and forecasting errors affecting them respectively. Interactions do exist between supply and demand, and the difficulties encountered in taking these into account can contribute to these errors. Though the CEDEFOP methodology attempts to explain these interactions, the whole area remains fraught with uncertainty. This is an inherent limitation of the matching approach underlying any quantitative forecasting of jobs and skills<sup>19</sup>.
- This assessment also requires ***better knowledge of the sources of hiring and the recruitment methods*** used by different sectors and professions: internal recruitment (changing jobs within a company); professional markets

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<sup>19</sup> Such an approach is aimed at matching the job held by a person with the training he or she has received. Yet the relationship between training and job requirements is flexible, involving personal choices in what training to do and which jobs to look for. Such choices take into account, as constraints, the inadequacies plaguing the labour market while at the same time leveraging, as opportunities, any positive developments that may have occurred.

(changing employers without changing one's occupation); external job markets for recruiting both young employees and experienced "old hands" (leading companies to explain how they weigh up whether to go for external recruitment or internal training). The detailed representation of manpower flows is a key factor in identifying the ways various trades get their workforces, but it remains incomplete.

- The CEDEFOP forecasts of supply and demand for skills are based **on methods combining a reasoned extrapolation of long-term trends with the explicit consideration of economic determinants**. The correct interpretation of the results by end-users presupposes that the methods used are transparent. In spite of the effort invested by CEDEFOP in informing users, this is no minor job, due for the main part to the technical nature of these methods and the empirical adjustments their application requires. The attention of end-users undoubtedly needs to be drawn to some key points: the weighting of intermediate-level skills in the overall demand for labour expressed by companies will be dependent on the position envisaged for industry in the future European economy. The two-way relationship between the workforce's skill level and the overall competitiveness of a country's economy needs to be better clarified in the forecasting work done by the CEDEFOP, distinguishing between assumptions, reasoning and results. Sectoral redeployment, international trade, technological and organizational changes all interact in determining company demand for labour and skills. In this respect, the study of CEDEFOP scenarios remains difficult reading.

The discussions on the CEDEFOP's priorities, in which trade unions are involved, offer the chance of progress in overcoming the obstacles. The main paths needing to be investigated have been identified by the CEDEFOP: a projected survey of companies on their skill requirements and recruitment practices matching up to these; the taking into account of ESCO's detailed taxonomy - European Skills, Competencies and Occupations Taxonomy (see *infra*), currently being compiled, which is expected to be a better suited tool for measuring actual skill levels than the approximations resulting from the crossing of ISCO and ISCED classifications; analysing and measuring in greater depth the tensions between supply and demand for skills<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The CEDEFOP has put in a lot of effort recently into making the portrayal of such tensions clearer. See: *Skill mismatch in Europe*, CEDEFOP, Briefing note, June 2010; *The skill matching challenge, Analysing skill mismatch & policy implications*, CEDEFOP, Publications Office of the European Union, 2010.

### 3.2. Sectoral surveys

The Commission has conducted a series of surveys in 19 sectors using a common methodology, a succession of steps providing a consistent well-grounded forecast: mapping the strengths and weaknesses of each sector; identifying the principal change factors and emerging job profiles; qualitative scenarios; the impact on employment and skills; companies' strategic options; implications for training and education; recommendations. These studies are available both in summarised and detailed versions. One synthesis presents a clear summary reflecting the diversity of sectoral situations and potential paths in terms of qualifications and skills <sup>21</sup>. The conclusion drawn is that the overall changes, the European economy will be seeing, will be greatly dependent on the nature of the sectoral redeployments which are bound to occur: if the trend towards relative growth of the service sector remains, it will be difficult to determine the fate of industrial specialisations in advance.

Trade unions are aware of these studies, using them with great interest. They have already exchanged views with the authors, helping also in their compilation via constructive criticism. Nonetheless, in their opinion these studies are often too "futuristic and abstract", not taking operational factors sufficiently into account and therefore of limited use in social dialogue, in particular with regard to defining action on training. They consider that the real-life skill management schemes practised in companies and the differences between countries need to be more explicitly taken into account: skill needs are not just simply a consequence of future economic, technological and organisational changes; seen the other way round, the response to these needs determines the course of such changes, via the strategic options open to companies and the subsequent evolution of European competitiveness.

As these surveys are not based on the same methodology as forecasts produced by CEDEFOP, it is only to be expected that the results are not identical, even on such important points as the expected development of intermediate-skilled jobs. Even though these differences are a source of enrichment for discussions rather than a source of confusion, they still need to be interpreted in a strict manner, as the sectoral scope, the classifications used, the business assumptions, etc. can differ greatly between the two approaches for any one given sector. As a means of comparing and possibly bringing the two approaches closer together, the Sector Councils could provide a welcome forum. They could contribute to a **better**

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<sup>21</sup> These surveys are available on the Commission's website: <http://ec.europa.eu/restructuringsandjobs>. See also the summary document: *Transversal Analysis on the Evolution of Skills Needs in 19 Economic Sectors*, Report prepared by Oxford Research for DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, January 2010.

**coordination of the various types of forward-looking studies**, at present conducted independently of each other.

### **3.3. The contribution of forward-looking studies**

CEDEFOP's baseline scenario for 2020 highlights the **expected level of professional mobility** reflecting the disparity between low net job creation (7.2 million between 2010 and 2020) and the high number of vacancies (80.3 million, i.e. adding together the 7.2 million above and 73 million jobs to be refilled). This is the consequence of the replacement of the working population, taking into account the major retirement flows. Such magnitudes lead us to consider as sensitive the quality of the "replacement module" which, in the global model used by CEDEFOP, describes and simulates the demographic renewal of the workforce. This renewal will lead to numerous vacancies in all professional areas, especially in jobs occupied by the medium-skilled. Such medium-skilled people will still make up half of Europe's working population in 2020, even if their numbers are not growing as fast as those of the highly-qualified.

**The twin trend of a rise in the level of training in the working population and the number of jobs demanding higher qualifications** (managers, professionals and technicians) is a major trend expected to continue. The creation of jobs requiring medium-level qualifications appears to be more sensitive to the degree of optimism in the scenario than for jobs requiring high or low skill levels<sup>22</sup>. It is related to changes in the demographic and sectoral structure. The proportion of people with medium-level qualifications is more pronounced among the over-40s, compared to younger workers. These older workers can be found in industrial jobs which are under threat. If such threats materialise, the net creation of jobs in the industrial sector to be expected will drop to a very low level, with - should it become negative - not all retirements being replaced.

Sector surveys conducted by the Commission in the 2000s, prior to the crisis, reflect the sharp decline in the employment of skilled manual workers in industrial production and the energy sector. In the coming decade, the combination of technological progress favouring the highly-qualified and the off-shoring of medium-skilled production jobs brings with it the risk of accentuating this trend in these areas. The synthesis document summarising the 19 sector studies identifies the sectors

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<sup>22</sup> This important point is explained more clearly in a CEDEFOP report issued prior to the crisis than in the more recent and comprehensive forecasts published in 2010. See: *Future skill supply in Europe. Medium-term forecast up to 2020 – Synthesis report*, CEDEFOP, Publications Office of the European Union, 2009. It is a point worthy of being taken up and deepened in the context of forecasting supply and demand for skills from now on, in relation to the wide range of paths that can be envisaged for the post-crisis European economy.

particularly hit: the automotive industry, shipbuilding, the IT and electro-mechanical industries, chemicals as well, not to mention textiles... Sectors capable of combining growth in employment and upskilling would seem to be in the minority, involving mainly service sectors such as healthcare and telecommunications.

**Gender also plays a role in the dynamics of qualifications:** qualification levels of women are rising at a faster pace than those of men. In terms of labour supply, women are now practically level pegging men at high qualification levels. The changes in activity rates of women and older workers will therefore have profound effects on the dynamics of qualifications. This is an important point from a trade union point of view. The replacement of older male workers by new generations of women is a factor pushing up qualification levels. In an optimistic scenario meeting the employment needs of the whole population, this development may lead to a smooth adjustment in favour of gender equality at work. However, in a less expansive scenario, skilled women risk being confronted by imbalances in the labour market hindering full recognition of their qualifications

The CEDEFOP forecasts do indeed point to the threat **of a polarised net expansion of jobs**, mainly benefiting highly-skilled occupations but also so-called elementary jobs, consisting of simple and routine tasks requiring little initiative. Such polarisation brings with it a twofold risk: the "relegation" of qualified people into elementary, low-quality jobs, preventing the low-qualified from taking up these jobs. CEDEFOP is warning that this trend towards polarisation could be more pronounced in countries still in transition towards a service economy. Does this mean that such polarisation is a reflection of the weakening of the industrial base of such countries, shutting out workers with intermediate skills? CEDEFOP fears that the continuing effect of the crisis could lead to such an imbalance, with the risk tangible in the aggregate changes. In its baseline scenario, European employment levels are not expected to return to their 2008 peak in 2020. For a European working population approaching 250 million in 2020, the crisis is expected to have caused the loss of some 10 million jobs (compared with a fictitious non-crisis scenario). According to the CEDEFOP's baseline scenario, this loss will not be reabsorbed before 2025.

In the CEDEFOP forecasts, **the assumption of a significant proportion of the workforce being overqualified** is based on two distinct but interlinked developments:

- **the continued growth of "elementary occupations"**<sup>23</sup> calling for people with medium or high qualification levels. Transportation, hotels and catering, healthcare and social care, maintenance and cleaning services are sectors

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<sup>23</sup> Such so-called elementary occupations involve services, agriculture, industry and transportation. *Labourers* are typical of such jobs, though not the only ones.

particularly affected. These are also sectors calling for high qualifications and therefore likely to fuel the above-mentioned polarisation. CEDEFOP's baseline scenario provides a foreseeable magnitude of the phenomenon: some three million jobs for people with medium or high qualifications are expected to be created in "elementary occupations", with one million jobs for the low-qualified expected to disappear in the same occupations. In comparison with a net creation of 7.2 million jobs between 2010 and 2020, this is no small figure.

- ***The imbalance between supply and demand of qualifications in different occupations***, measured according to the three aggregate levels of the ISCED classification. Supply and demand are forecast separately, then adjusted in an attempt to eliminate the discrepancies not likely to be found in a real imbalance. The supply of medium and high-level qualifications by those equipped with such is growing faster than the corresponding demand stated by employers. This gap does not only involve elementary occupations.

The continuing existence of high rates of unemployment caused by the crisis gives rise to fears of the ***less-skilled experiencing major difficulties finding work again***, as they are having to compete with higher qualified people ready to take on jobs considered to be elementary. The 2010 unemployment rate of people with a qualification not exceeding the first cycle of secondary education is over 18% throughout the EU (against ca. 10% for the whole of the working population). In the CEDEFOP's baseline scenario, it is expected to only decline slowly, remaining above 16% in 2020 (against 8% for the whole of the working population). The recession is hitting the employment of the lower skilled particularly hard, thereby undermining social cohesion. The risks of labour shortages in certain highly qualified occupations will be coexisting with a long-term degradation of the situation of the lower skilled, leading to an increased necessity to better match supply and demand for labour to prevent tensions turning into long-term imbalances. Although this situation calls for the establishment of qualifying mobility paths for low-skilled workers, there remains a question-mark over the impact of the crisis on private and public training budgets.

The conceptual refinement is leading to a distinction between different types of difficulties experienced in matching skill supply and demand. The CEDEFOP document on the *skills mismatch in Europe* makes a subtle distinction between over-education, over-qualification, and over-skilling. On the one hand such subtle distinctions may seem illusory if attributable to a "hyper-matching" temptation, an

attempt to match as closely as possible supply and demand of skills on the job market; on the other hand, it could be an incentive to improve the information system with a view to achieving a measure of the imbalances stricter than that currently available. It is not clear whether the standard classifications take into account any potential upskilling required by jobs too quickly considered to be elementary.

CEDEFOP is honest in acknowledging the limits of the approximations currently used, for reasons of statistic availability. These approximations equate skills with the crossing of occupations (27 occupations according to ISCO) and levels of formal qualification (in accordance with the ISCED's three aggregate levels). The indicators of imbalances based on this understanding of skills stem more from assumptions than from precise measurements, in part because they are restricted to skills acquired in a formal manner.

In reality, supply and demand for skills are not two totally independent variables: comparing them practically gives rise to adjustments changing our initial perception of imbalances, notably through the process of on-the-job learning and training measures targeting job-seekers. We need better information here. The survey of European companies envisaged by CEDEFOP could be a means of achieving this, gaining a better understanding of how they view and handle skill management. Pressing for a relevant and detailed taxonomy of occupations and skills (like the one the ESCO programme intends to promote) is useful, though we should not succumb to the illusion of wanting to plan skill dynamics down to the very last detail. The recognition and identification of informal (and therefore not so visible) qualifications will introduce greater flexibility, contrasting with the rigidity of a logic based solely on formal matching. Encouraging the Sector Councils to better understand the dynamics of practical training, both in companies and sectors, is explicitly referred to by the CEDEFOP authorities in their discussion on medium-term work priorities.

***Leeway for progress*** certainly exists, ***with a better interaction needed between the quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in the sectoral forward-looking of employment and skills***. The Sector Councils could become a privileged forum for such interaction, with real-time contributions from social players.

#### 4. *Learning outcomes: evolution or revolution?*

##### 4.1. *An evolution assumed by the trade union movement*

The orientation aimed at making better use of *learning outcomes*, highlighted in the expert group's report to the Commission, has been well-received by the trade unionists surveyed. It involves:

- ***giving the on-the-job development of vocational skills a greater role in the acquisition and validation of skills;***
- ***focusing attention on learning outcomes gained throughout a worker's professional career rather than just on diplomas issued at the end of formal initial education.***

Even so, this orientation does raise a series of questions:

- ***Its compatibility with the business model*** adopted by a company, determining the benefit to be expected from improving the skill levels of its employees: better pay and/or better employability. This is obviously not without relevance for an employee's personal motivation. Collective bargaining on such issues remains limited. The need to make training a mandatory collective bargaining dimension, with an acknowledged place on the agenda, is strongly felt by trade unionists from a range of sectors;
- ***the nature and degree of responsibility assumed by trade unions*** in training and skill assessment issues. Is their participation in partner, sectoral and transversal institutions driving and regulating initial and continuing training, as well as the identification and certification of skills, the right way? Do they need to become more greatly involved in the negotiation of training programmes within companies and sectors? Do they even need to go as far as providing services to employees in this field?

The answers to these questions depend on trade unions' traditions and their sensitivity to such issues. Trade unions are destined to play a role in the negotiation and monitoring of training because the skills acquired and recognised are part and parcel of the world of work. It is a field not to be left solely in the hands of salesmen selling training courses.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> As a national example: in her presentation at the conference held by ETUC on 2 - 3 September 2010, Petra Völkerer outlined the role played by the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (see her presentation on the ETUC website under <http://www.etuc.org/a/7616> and the site of the Chamber itself [www.wien.arbeiterkammer.at](http://www.wien.arbeiterkammer.at)). Closely linked with the Austrian Trade Unions, the Chamber of Labour represents the interests of some 3 million workers and consumers, with membership mandatory for employees, apprentices and the unemployed. The Chamber's activities include the co-determination and monitoring of the legislative process, research in different areas (including life-long training) on behalf of its constituents, and services to its members (e.g. the provision of legal and social support).

In a number of sectors, trade unions are engaged in defining, together with partners, **occupational profiles**, on either a national or European scale: these profiles are intended to be taken into account by private and public institutions acting as intermediaries in bringing together those offering jobs and job seekers in the labour market. When work requiring mobility is involved, at least for certain categories of the workforce, these efforts can be supported by such EU instruments as EQF (the European Qualifications Framework) or ECVET (the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training). The European Qualifications Framework is a sort of "Esperanto", **a common language**, setting down basic and useful principles for the recognition of qualifications (see box); it is not yet an operational instrument issuing practical equivalence or enabling workers to move around freely in the European labour market, as it remains too distant from the languages spoken by national players and their representations. Any direct application of the EQF is difficult, when confronted by a dual system of higher education with a major distinction between academic and vocational training. The European instruments are often perceived as useful references but still too abstract or *top-down* for practical use in the field.

In sectors with a "natural" affinity to mobility, it is easier to spotlight the frameworks for recognising and certifying skills in social dialogue and collective bargaining, even if many cases to be dealt with are not easy ones. The transportation sector offers several cases illustrating this. Significant steps forward can be seen, such as the compilation of "professional passports" in the areas of agriculture and tourism by the social partners. Eurocadres, an organisation which has done a great amount of work on the mobility of managers and professionals, is suggesting complementing the EQF by a second stage, a "European grid for the recognition of professional qualifications" based on a sectoral approach and a multi-stakeholder dialogue and including different types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) <sup>25</sup>.

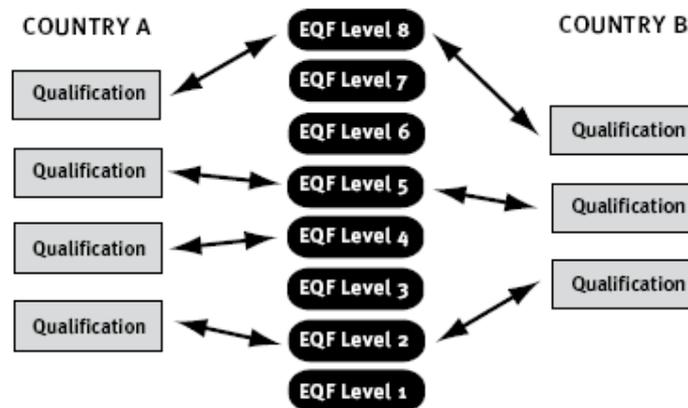
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<sup>25</sup> Pieter Tratsaert and Erik de Smedt, *Skills and competences for mobility in a competitive Europe*, Report for Eurocadres, CEPLIS, AIDP, April 2009

## EQF: an instrument for translating certified levels of qualification

(qualification = knowledge + skills + competencies)

The EQF works as a translation device which, via its eight-level scale of qualifications, is supposed to enable national qualifications to be made equivalent to each other in a transparent manner ...



... However such translation is far from being automatic. The EQF uses a grid, with capabilities in vertical columns and levels of expertise in horizontal lines. Any given EQF level (see the Level 5 example below) is characterised by a combination of capabilities in terms of *knowledge*, *skills*, and *competences*. The situation becomes complicated when considering that a person could have, for example, knowledge at a higher level and skills or competences at a lower level.

Level 5	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others

## **4.2. Major implications for the regulation of the labour market**

The *learning outcomes* approach is likely to improve "flexicurity" in the labour market:

- The recognition of skills acquired on-the-job improves **employability**, thereby helping people to become better equipped for successful professional transitions.
- It also **gives the labour market "greater depth"**: generic skills acquired at specific workplaces become available to other employers.
- The imbalances between supply and demand for skills are **less rigid** than when only taking formal school curricula and higher education diplomas into account, with actually available skills being better indicated.

A labour market recognising the different forms of learning requires suitable rules and players committed to respecting them:

- **transparent methodologies** and the clear **responsibility of accreditation bodies**, in order to effectively guarantee the equivalency of skills, whether acquired formally, non-formally or informally;
- cooperation between the social partners and public and private employment agencies with a view to **uniform qualifications frameworks** for initial and continuing vocational training;
- **receptiveness of educational and training systems** to requirements for diplomas and certificates to be described in terms of vocational skills and competences.

By mobilizing their networks, Sector Councils could play a useful role, evaluating *learning outcomes* typical of a given occupation. They could indeed offer a stable forum for analysing concrete changes within critical occupations, ones hit by concrete economic, technological and environmental changes, by balancing direct observations, statistics and forecasts. By developing and driving studies close to the field, the Councils would contribute to improving the European programmes by taking the concrete dynamics of occupations into account.

This would be in continuation of a recommendation found in the ECORYS report for Councils to "achieve early results by focusing on a limited number of activities and on the quick delivery of high-quality output". This would also be in continuation of experiences already gained, such as the study project of the bricklaying trade developed jointly by European trade union and employer federations in the construction industry. Such studies, focusing on specified occupations, enable

national training and skill definition systems to be closely compared with each other. This is a precondition for making effective progress towards the mutual recognition of such skills. Based on this understanding, issues of normative efficiency can be addressed more easily: responsibility for accreditation, professional passports, and quality assurance criteria.

### **4.3. From EQF to ESCO**

Convergence, i.e. the process of referencing National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) to the EQF, is in progress and expected to be completed by 2012. This deadline was confirmed by the EU Council at its Employment and Social Policy meeting held in June 2010, which stated the expected content of this convergence:

- Driving a common trend towards comprehensive NQFs, covering all types and levels of qualifications and defined in line with national traditions;
- referencing national qualification levels to EQF levels;
- implementing the *learning outcomes* approach;
- encouraging integration between academic and vocational education:
  - through the use of consistent descriptors covering all types and levels of qualification ...
  - .... or through the introduction of parallel strands of qualifications for EQF highest levels (6 - 8): one for academic qualifications, one for more vocational qualifications.

The announcement of these orientations by the Employment Council naturally led to a number of reactions. The European Trade Union Committee on Education (ETUCE) is concerned about the risks of a possible "over-standardisation" of educational systems: "The ETUCE wishes to stress its support for the diversity of the education systems in the EU, as well as the need to ensure that the EQF and the creation of NQFs will not lead to a process of harmonisation of the structure of education systems" <sup>26</sup>. For education trade unionists, education policies cannot be solely oriented towards the current and future (difficult to predict) status of labour markets. School and higher education and life-long learning are there to enable people to achieve their goals in life. They are not there as a substitute for the social protection needed due to the ups and downs of the labour market.

The operational limits of the EQF justify the ongoing development of the ESCO Programme, compiling a taxonomy for *European Skills, Competencies and*

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<sup>26</sup> ETUCE statement on the conclusions of the Employment Council under the title "New skills for new jobs: the road to follow", June 2010

*Occupations*<sup>27</sup>. The fundamental objective of this programme is "the development, at a European level, of the first ever multilingual dictionary linking skills and competencies to occupations", including several thousand descriptors. The aim is to improve practical interoperability (but not total harmonisation) between labour market players and education / training players. Employers and employment services are expected to use ESCO "to define a set of skills and competencies required when they are developing a job description".

A relevant typology of skills is seen as a way of mobilising a whole range of criteria: skills specific to a trade or activity and transversal skills; technical, managerial or socio-cultural skills, etc. Digital and environmental skills will from now on also play an important role in the category of technical skills, alongside more traditional though developing skills such as process management, expertise of materials, etc.; the ability to communicate internationally is becoming a key factor of socio-cultural and managerial skills. Crossing these criteria should enable the definition of skill mixes required by occupations and business operations themselves subject to change.

The implementation of the ESCO programme is taking place at a fast pace, with the launch phase, consisting of the introduction of a complex system of governance, expected to be completed by the end of 2010. Such speed should not however be over-hasty: the Sector Councils could inject a useful bottom-up approach into the building of ESCO with a view to having occupational changes affecting required skills in given occupations taken into account. The agenda of the ESCO programme and its reference groups, responsible for its development, should be adapted to the nascent contribution of the Sector Councils.

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<sup>27</sup> See *ESCO, the forthcoming European Skills, Competencies and Occupations taxonomy*, EMPL D-3/LK D(2009), European Commission, January 2010

#### **4.4. National systems encouraged to change**<sup>28</sup>

Having national training and education systems take European frameworks and programmes into account is not without consequence for the coherence and dynamics of these systems. With such systems characterised by a wide diversity, they have no common understanding of the concept of skills and competences. Some systems, such as the British NVQ (*National Vocational Qualifications*) system focus on skill granularity, defined as the ability to perform a range of elementary tasks associated with a given workplace. Others, such as the German or French systems, take a more integrated approach to skills, understanding them as the command of both theoretical and practical knowledge. In Holland, there is a particular focus on taking civic and moral dimensions into account. To ensure transparent correspondence between national qualification systems, it is not sufficient to just have European reference frameworks, drawn up in a both careful and pragmatic manner. There are conceptual differences between these systems, anchored in longstanding national traditions and customs and materialised in the way their institutions work.

The European schemes have an ambitious ultimate goal : to encourage the free movement of Europeans both within training systems and in the labour market, by “decompartmentalising” general education and vocational training and integrating initial and continuous training into a unified qualifications framework. Without losing sight of this ultimate goal, it might be more realistic to set a more modest intermediate goal, mobilizing the European frameworks as a heuristic tool to reveal the differences and tensions existing between national approaches, in a spirit of mutual trust. The problems posed by the discrepancies between countries need to be resolved, without being artificially swept under the carpet.

The national qualifications frameworks are themselves often far from being homogenous. In many cases they portray a more or less pronounced internal pluralism or heterogeneity, covering principles and logical structures differing from one trade to the next and according to the various components of the training system. Any referencing to the EQF and other European programmes can potentially change the relationships built up between national stakeholders. There is a risk of the hierarchy of skills proposed by the EQF colliding with the classification logic taken for granted in a national framework. The automatic application of the EQF can moreover

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<sup>28</sup> This section is based on the study of Philippe Méhaut and Christopher Winch, "The European Qualifications Framework: what national strategies of adjustment?", *Formation Emploi*, No. 108, 2009, and Philippe Méhaut's presentation at the conference held by ETUC on 2 - 3 September 2010. This study is part of a joint work: *Knowledge, Skills, Competence: towards equivalence of European vocational qualifications*, Brockmann, Clarke, Winch (Eds), Taylor and Francis, London, 2010.

have perverse effects, "over-hierarchically" segmenting the working population and ghettoising the very low-skilled, labelled as such on the bottom EQF levels. There is no guarantee that their employability will become any better.

Taking *learning outcomes* more explicitly into account in skill frameworks does however provide an incentive for education systems to have the diplomas they issue better aligned with the skills they are certifying (*outcomes* rather than *inputs*). Though the EQF is not an indisputable reference, used wisely, with the right critical distance, it can be a lever for national developments involving social partners. Intermediate-level employees (technical staff, local managers, etc), with their high-level technological skills and a range of basic operational skills, can be expected to benefit from the recognition and promotion of these qualifications, particularly needed if industrial capacities are to have long-term prospects.

## **5. Vocational training, life-long learning: an ongoing building site**

### **5.1. An already consistent EU acquis**

The promotion of *life-long learning* is a European ambition with a longstanding history going back to the 1970s. In the course of the 1990s, on the basis of discussions driven by the Commission President of that time, Jacques Delors, a series of programmes (Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci) and processes (Bologna and Copenhagen) came to see the light of day. Their objective was :

- to bridge the gap between initial and continuing education, promoting life-long learning,
- to promote the mutual recognition of qualifications and skills.
- to encourage individual mobility in Europe.

In the 2000s, the Lisbon Strategy included training as an essential field, with the Open Method of Coordination being applied to it:

- Guidelines were defined to help set out coherent national strategies.
- Strategic objectives were announced:
  - on the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems;
  - on access to education and training for everybody;
  - on opening up to the world.
- detailed objectives and indicators were established to benchmark and influence national practices.

In June 2010, a Communication from the Commission announced key issues in education and vocational training<sup>29</sup>, outlining a table of objectives and instruments for European cooperation. In the box below, you will find a summary of the main points of this Communication.

### **The Communication from the Commission on vocational education, June 2010.**

Though not really innovative, the Communication does present an up-to-date list of EU objectives and instruments. Two main ideas are to be found:

**1- To equip people with the right mix of skills and to enable them to update them**, via initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET):

– balancing:

- key competences (the basis for life-long learning) and professional capabilities (factors of professional excellence).
- standardised skills (as productivity factors) and individual creative skills (as innovation factors).

– encouraging systems favouring life-long learning:

- facilitating access to CVET.
- providing people with guidance services and enabling individual learning paths.
- ensuring transparent and consistent recognition of *learning outcomes*.

**2- To modernise vocational education and training (VET) systems:**

– by developing and bringing closer together national qualifications frameworks by referencing them to the EQF, thereby:

- encouraging permeability between VET and higher education (HE)
- removing barriers and ceilings via transparent qualifications and portability of *learning outcomes*.

– by making cross-border mobility a way for upskilling, via the system for transferring VET credits (ECVET)

– by promoting a culture of quality, via a quality assurance policy based on a European reference framework (EQAVET).

- making Sector Councils a tool for mobilising social partners with a view to broadcasting information and best practices regarding the organisation, delivery and funding of VET.

This Communication reaffirms a number of objectives and principles of action supported by European trade unionists, who are calling for a right to training, accessible to all citizens and all workers<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy*, European Commission, COM(2010) 296 final, 9 June 2010.

<sup>30</sup> See *ETUC Resolution on initial and continuous vocational training for a European employment strategy*, adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee on 16-17 March 2009.

## **5.2. Achievements falling short of ambitions**

The consistent EU "plugging" of its life-long learning ambition serves to underscore all the more its discrepancy with reality, where its achievements are far more mediocre. The resources devoted to this ambitious goal and the results achieved remain too limited to satisfy the individual and collective needs for training in the EU-27. Effective access to life-long learning remains overall too weak, and too unevenly spread between countries and people. In all countries, the proportion of European adults with no effective access to CVET is considerable.

### **European statistical sources on VET**

Two main sources of comparative information on VET are available:

- **The Continuing Vocational Training Survey** coordinated by Eurostat. This survey looks at CVET funded either partially or wholly by companies for their employees. It is based on a questionnaire (identical for all countries) sent out to private sector companies with at least 10 employees. It provides statistical results comparable between countries on supply and demand for occupational skills, the training offered by companies, the way it is conducted, its content, the amount of training, the use of internal and external resources, and expenditure on training. To date, the survey has been carried out three times: CVTS-1 looking at the situation in 1993, CVTS-2 in 1999, and the most recent, CVTS-3 in 2005. The latest survey (CVTS-3) covers all 27 EU countries and Norway, with 100 000 companies being surveyed.

- **The Adult Education Survey**, a pilot survey at European level. This provides structural data on adults' (25 - 64 years-old) take-up of life-long learning opportunities. It distinguishes between two types of training: "formal training" provided by schools, colleges, universities and other types of formal education institutions; and non-formal training, i.e. all forms of organised and supported educational activity not corresponding to the previous definition. The statistics are gradually becoming available for EU countries, as well as for Croatia, Turkey and Norway. Data for 18 countries was published in November 2008. The survey describes participation in formal and non-formal training, the reasons behind such participation, obstacles encountered, costs, and the modalities and intensity of participation.

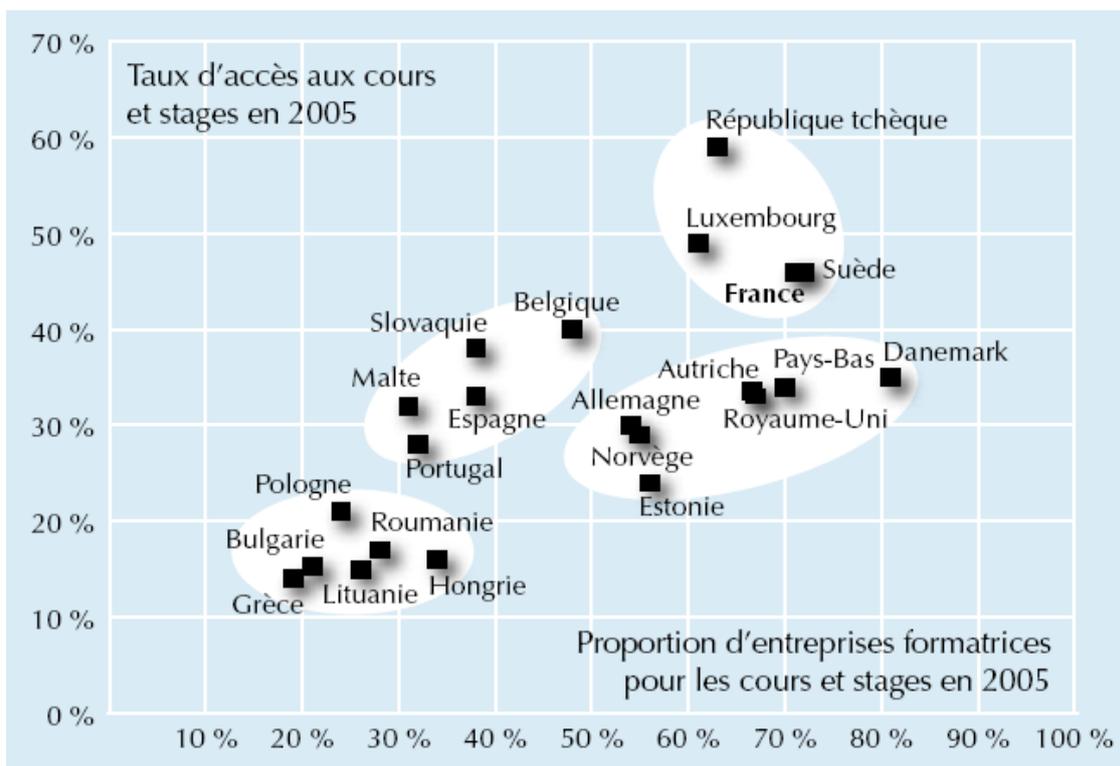
A number of salient features can be learned from European statistical sources:

- ***The intensity of training efforts within companies is very unevenly spread from country to country and company to company***, with the size of the latter being a key factor. Two types of inequalities interfere with each one: access of workers in SMEs to training is much more difficult if they live in countries where the overall effort of companies in this direction is weak (see the two figures below). Workers in SMEs may even be completely denied access to training, while at the same time the same SMEs are struggling to attract talent. Crossing the proportion of companies providing training with the rate of employee access to training allows European countries to be grouped into relatively homogeneous groups: a group of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries seems to be particularly disadvantaged with regard to both criteria. The magnitude of inequalities between countries is confirmed when comparing adult participation in formal CVET. The rate of participation is above 10% in some countries (the United Kingdom, Sweden, Belgium and Finland). The EU-27 average is 6.3%, with certain countries (Hungary, Greece and France) having very low levels (below 2.5%)<sup>31</sup>. The number of hours dispensed in formal adult education provides a second indicator taken from the Adult Education Survey: even though countries are not classified the same way, the discrepancies are again major: participants in formal training spend on average 905 hours in courses in Germany, 413 in Spain, 367 in Italy, 339 in France, with some countries hardly reaching 200 hours.

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<sup>31</sup> Indications drawn from the Adult Education Survey are included in the calculations made by Mathilde Lemoine and Etienne Wasmer in their report on employee mobility: *Les mobilités des salariés*, Conseil d'Analyse Economique, Documentation Française, Paris, 2010.

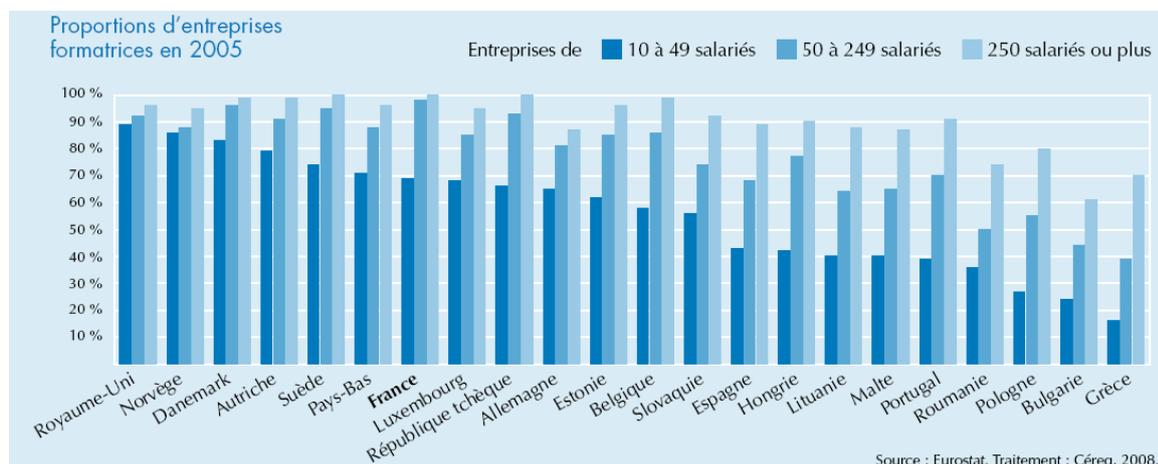
## Training intensity in European companies



**Horizontal axis:** % of firms realizing training actions (2005)

**Vertical axis:** Rate of access of workers to training

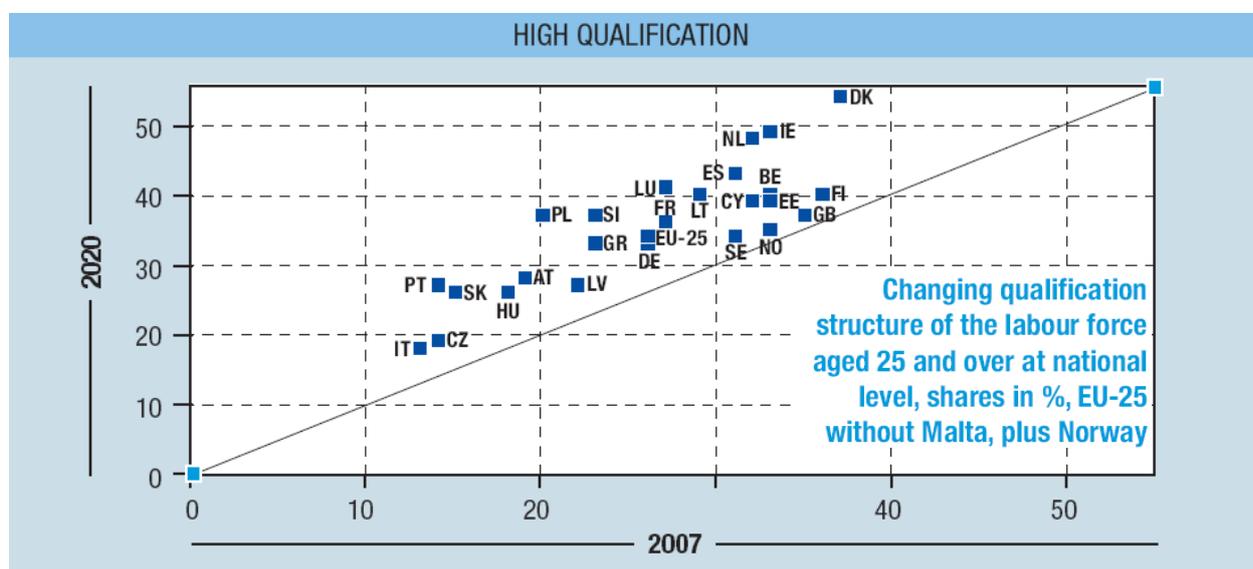
## Company involvement in training according to size (number of employees)



**Vertical axis:** % of firms realizing training actions (2005)

**Source:** "La formation continue dans les entreprises européennes. Premiers pas vers une homogénéisation", *Brief*, N° 251 April 2008, Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications (CEREQ), in accordance with CVTS-3

- A comparison of the CVTS surveys between 1999 and 2005 points to certain steps toward a standardisation of CVET practices in European companies. But today's extrapolated trend when comparing levels of qualification of the working population across countries does not see countries lagging behind catching up with the front-runners. If we are to believe the CEDEFOP forecasts on the supply of skills in 2020, the expected increase in the proportion of people with high qualifications (ISCED levels 5 and 6) is not higher in countries lagging behind (see figure below). In its updated forecasts published in 2010, CEDEFOP insists that such a catching up is tangible when aggregating the high and medium levels of qualification, though it acknowledges that this is not the case when just taking the higher level of qualification into account. This **failure to catch up** does not only affect the latest Member States, with Italy and Spain also affected. In the CEE, skills often remain a subject of secondary importance for social partners. They are only slowly becoming a key issue, in spite of the support offered by the EU programmes, in particular the European Social Fund, to develop VET and engage the social partners in this development<sup>32</sup>.



**Source:** Future skill supply in Europe: medium-term forecast up to 2020, Main conclusions, CEDEFOP newsletter, 2009

<sup>32</sup> At the conference organised by the ETUC on 2 - 3 September 2010, Anna Kwiatkiewicz (BPI-Polska) reported on the difficulties encountered in Poland: poor incentives, lack of stakeholder engagement, financial constraints all combined to relegate VET issues to the background. But there were efforts and initiatives, both legislative and contractual, underway to change this situation.

- A direct survey of European employees confirms ***the inequality of national situations*** and the fact that there is still much to be done, even when considering countries supposedly advanced and relatively close to each other: ***needs are widely considered common but opportunities unequal***. In March 2010, a sample survey carried out by the CEGOS Observatory interviewed 2200 employees in four countries, i.e. 550 employees in each of the countries Germany, France, Spain and the United Kingdom<sup>33</sup>. Certain common features emerged: training is mainly dependent on a worker's personal initiative (61% of employees), with a majority of employees willing to take training courses outside working hours (76%). Differences start appearing when looking at the obstacles: For 25% of employees (29% in Germany and 34% in Spain), the main reason for a lack of training over the past three years is "no training is ever offered in my company", whereas in France the main reason (22%) given is the following: "I am not one of the people to be trained". Differences are also evident when looking at achievements: on average, 69% of employees consider that their companies are using all possible means to define training needs and implement training opportunities, with this proportion ranging from 75% in the United Kingdom to 61% in France. Inequalities also apply to new training methods: on average, 38% of employees have benefited from *e-learning* courses, though the figures range from 54% in Spain, 42% in the United Kingdom, 37% in Germany to 19% in France. The scope of *e-learning* is certainly being debated, with the trade union movement no exception. E-learning cannot to be taken for granted when workers with no ready access to a computer in the normal course of their work are involved. The (French) adage that "it always rains where it's wet," which is especially true for access to training, could see its relevance increased by the spread of *e-learning*. The use of *e-learning* is not to be viewed separately from an effort to promote digital skills among the whole population.

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<sup>33</sup> *Quelle formation professionnelle aujourd'hui et pour demain ?*, CEGOS, May 2010

### 5.3. The hesitant search for the right incentives

Such a low-average or even mediocre European landscape calls for progress on three fronts: training **incentives**, targeting both individuals and companies; making **resources** available to vocational training; and improving the **effectiveness** of training programmes and activities.

The expert group requested by the Commission to make proposals on an action programme for concretising the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative considers the improvement and strengthening of training incentives to be one of four priority lines of action<sup>34</sup>. While not providing a miracle recipe, the report of the expert group does draw attention to several important points:

- The **incentives targeting individuals** are not to be seen separately from people's **personal motivation** and the **services** they are offered. There is obviously more motivation for individuals to acquire skills when these are better recognised in terms of pay and employability. The quality of guidance and advisory services, which go hand in hand with employability, are a further factor in such motivation. The interaction of personal motivation, incentives and services must make sense to individuals, enabling them to plot their futures. On this basis, training co-investment schemes giving joint responsibility to individuals, companies and employment agencies can be envisaged and implemented. These include such schemes as *learning accounts* and *learning vouchers*.
- The **incentives targeting companies** depend on peer pressure to spread best practices. It is obviously a good incentive when an increased investment in training becomes a competitive advantage. But this is not going to happen automatically. The contribution to a company's competitiveness made by its investment in training depends on its ability to foster a **work organisation more focused on leveraging skills** than on any close matching of skills to workplaces. In such a company context, **financial incentives** (incentives targeting certain categories such as low-skilled workers and older workers; fiscal provisions allowing investments in training to be included in depreciation) will gain in effectiveness. As for SMEs, what they need is a network of institutions and financial support for their investments in training, all on the right regional scale.

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<sup>34</sup> *New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now. A report by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs*, European Commission, February 2010. At the conference organised by ETUC on 2-3 September 2010, Mike Campbell and Jim Devine, both members of the expert group, spoke about these recommendations.

- Improved incentives also concern private and public stakeholders in VET. These need to be dependent on assessment criteria favouring high performers.

The current debates and reforms underway in a number of countries show that the right mix of incentives is no easy matter. The set of financial incentives is not to be seen separately from work organisation, in companies, and from institutional organisation, on the collective level. Stakeholder behaviour takes all these factors into account - both the constraints and the opportunities opened up by them. Last but not least, the wide range of national modes of organisation obviously does not help simplify the definition of common orientations in the different countries.

#### **5.4. Continuing structural differences between national systems**

Put simply, several groups of countries can be identified on the basis of two criteria<sup>35</sup>:

- ***the relationship between initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET): integration or separation.***
- ***the nature of regulations governing CVET: centralised, decentralised, weak.***

Having CVET integrated into IVET (as in the Nordic countries), is probably advantageous for promoting life-long learning, as there is a uniform framework for recognising and certifying skills.

In the continental and Mediterranean European countries, IVET and CVET tend to be separate, with CVET subject to more or less decentralised contractual provisions. The gradual emergence of an individual right of workers to training and the introduction of operational qualifications frameworks enhancing the transferability of personal skills constitute important issues in collective bargaining in these countries, on a sectoral and on an inter-professional level.

Where CVET regulation is weak, as is the case in the United Kingdom, the level of training is generally speaking dependent on the unilateral efforts of individual companies. *National Vocational Qualifications* help individuals "sell" their skills on the market.

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<sup>35</sup> See: Florence Lefresne, « Formation tout au long de la vie: des enjeux convergents dans des contextes institutionnels différents au sein de l'Europe », in *Travail et reconnaissance des compétences*, William Cavestro, Christine Durieux, Sylvie Monchatre, Economica, 2007.

Last but not least, the shortcomings of vocational training and social dialogue are to a great extent interrelated in many CEE countries.

This simple classification is sufficient for illustrating the variety found within Europe, without being exhaustive. Researchers have worked hard to characterize more fully national vocational training schemes, located at the intersection of industrial relations systems and public policies (education policy, active labour market policies) in each country. From a theoretical point of view, different "education and training regimes" are conceivable, combining political principles, stakeholder strategies, modes of governance, regulations and instruments (see box). National systems stem from specific compromises between these types of regimes with their longstanding traditions.

### **Types of education and training regimes**

On the basis of a review of a specific and detailed range of criteria, the researcher Eric Verdier has come up with a theoretical typology of education and training schemes (very briefly summarised below), using the "principle of justice" as a fundamental contributory criterion:

**- Decommodified regimes:**

- *Corporatist* (basic principle: access to a professional community)
- *Academic* (basic principle: school-based merit system)
- *Universal* (basic principle: compensation of initial inequalities)

**- Market regimes:**

- *(Pure competition market* (basic principle: usefulness of services provided for individual human capital)
- *organised market* (basic principle: fair price and quality of services developing skills as social capital)

With reference to this typology, the current European approach could be understood as an attempt in the direction of a new combination of regimes: corporatist, taking into account the sectoral mission of the Councils; universal, with a focus on fair opportunities and the right transitions for all workers; organised market, with pro-active training providers regulated by common rules on the agenda. Affirmation of this European regime could contribute - with due respect paid to subsidiarity - to correcting national deficiencies and spreading best practices.

<sup>1</sup> Eric Verdier, *European LLL Strategy and diversity of national devices: an interpretation in terms of public policy regimes*, European Consortium for Political Research, 2009 General Conference, Potsdam, 9-12 September 2009

### **5.5. Sector Councils and vocational training**

Sector Councils are intended to play a useful role in the sharing and comparison of national and regional experiences. If VET is going to be a key issue for Councils bringing together national players and institutions, these Councils will have to take into account the structural differences between countries, understanding them better and assessing their implications.

The survey of social partners conducted by ECORYS in the context of the report on the feasibility of Sector Councils led the authors to the following recommendation: "The emphasis of Sector Councils must be on issues relevant to both employers and employees." A large majority of respondents (72 %) opted for a dual focus of Sector Councils: Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) **and** Continuing Vocational Training (CVET). Even so, there were a number of subtle differences: employers were primarily interested in the responsiveness of IVET to developments they saw in the demand for skills; trade unions on the other hand were primarily interested by promoting CVET, considered as a "bodyguard" for both workers and companies.

The relationship between IVET and CVET should therefore legitimately be a core topic of Sector Councils, with a focus on:

- the definition of the right balance between trade union and employer priorities, thereby actively mobilising both sides.
- the establishment of a respectful and trusting link-up between the "parallel worlds" of education, training and business, seeking to promote active dialogue, and identifying and supporting future occupations at all skill levels. Nothing would be worse than a low-end balance between a poor training system producing generalists lacking occupational skills and companies clamouring for labour from a atrophied production system.
- the definition of an institutional framework providing training providers with orientation and making efficient use of available private and public funds. This point is all the more important, given the fact that, in various professional fields, there are already stakeholders and service providers trying to organise the entire "value chain" of training, certification and mobility.

European societies are finding it very difficult to find the right balance between two requirements not *per se* complementary:

- the priority need to strengthen the basic training and skills of the whole working population regardless of age. The response to this need determines not just the employability of low- and semi-skilled employees,

but also the long-term prospects of a dynamic European presence in business activities, and especially industrial ones, which continue to be a source of innovation, in particular in view of sustainable development.

- investment in attractive top-class training for potential talents, thereby ensuring the availability of creative capabilities in state-of-the-art fields and Europe's place at the frontier of knowledge and technological progress.

The difficulties encountered in finding a balanced response to this dual requirement and the varied distortions (e.g., the misguided channelling of mathematical and computer skills into the financial sector, "doped" by excessive salaries) help explain why today's employee world is subject to forces of dispersion and fragmentation. This is a fundamental challenge to cohesion, and not just of a social nature. It also determines the effectiveness and sustainability of economic development, which cannot rely in the long term merely on a narrow-based elite harvesting the excess profits of unequal growth.

The system of vocational training, whether initial or continuing, needs to combine an awareness for signals from the labour market and the foresight to take in shifts in society. Competitiveness clusters and R&D clusters linked to universities have a role to play in identifying and developing future core occupations at all skill levels. Many changes, in different fields, are now taking place quicker than generation replacement. The sustainable development of human capabilities can be based neither on indifference of the training system towards the labour market nor on the short-term clamouring of companies for labour restricted to immediate needs. The decision-making horizon can be expanded through organised cooperation between stakeholders in training, research and business, thereby better responding to the requirements of such a development. In this respect, the trade union movement has a key role to play, spurring on developments by making itself the voice of the needs and aspirations of workers.

## Conclusion

Seven main concepts are listed here as a summary of the above analyses:

1. Europe's ability to play an active role in the new competitive and environmental configuration of the global economy is dependent on one imperative: creating a dynamic balance between a resolute overall upskilling and the promotion of excellence, in the context of an inclusive labour market pushing back job precariousness, the cause of waste and lack of motivation.

2. The Sector Councils on Employment and Skills can become useful fora for the interaction of social dialogue and public policies. In a field where responsibility is exercised predominantly on a national level, they should have the mission to network national and regional players, with a view to forging a community sharing best practices and experiences.

3. *Leadership* of the Councils must be put in the hands of the social partners, thereby making the Councils an instrument complementing the Sector Social Dialogue Committees. The opening up the Councils to other players, in particular training organisations, is to be conceived on the basis of this leadership. The Councils could drive and coordinate forward-looking work with an operational focus, geared directly to the field experience of the actors and combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Studies targeting occupations subject to pressure and deep-going transformation would be of great use, contributing to relevant training programmes and activities.

4. The taking into account of *learning outcomes*, i.e. results of on-the-job learning throughout working careers, when recognising and validating skills, is a positive development welcomed by trade unionists. The fulfilment of this development calls for the adjustment of *business models* within companies, in order for this recognition to have a positive effect on the pay and employability of workers. It also encourages unions to take on greater responsibility, making skills and training a mandatory issue in collective bargaining.

5. The *learning outcomes* approach contributes to positive flexicurity: by improving recognised employability, the approach equips people better for job changes; by extending recognised skills beyond just diplomas certifying the completion of initial education or training, the approach benefits employers, helping

them gain a better overview of the skills offered; by encouraging education systems to better describe the skills associated with the diplomas issued, the approach helps young graduates to find jobs. This development is particularly welcome for intermediate-level qualifications, whose availability and promotion are vital for the long-term prospects of European industrial capacities.

6. For labour markets to function properly, taking *learning outcomes* into account, suitable regulation is needed: uniform frameworks, transparent methods, accreditation bodies responsible for certification of skills. Such European programmes as the European Qualifications Framework or the detailed taxonomy of skills and occupations currently being compiled continue in this direction. But, they are instruments whose take-up by the social partners remains limited and difficult. The operational studies carried out by the Sector Councils on given occupations could play an important role in making these instruments more attuned to requirements by making experience from the field available. Direct surveys of employers would allow a better understanding of practical training pathways and ways of leveraging skills within companies.

7. The long-proclaimed European goal of life-long learning contrasts sharply with the mediocrity of delivery: access to CVET remains low overall and is unevenly spread, from country to country, and from group to group. To date, there seems to be no real chance of countries lagging behind being able to catch up. The balance between advisory and guidance services offered to individuals, financial incentives for companies, and changes in work organisation enabling skills to better used, remains difficult to achieve. Deep-going differences between European countries in the design, organisation and regulation of national VET systems make it difficult to define common orientations. Even so, such differences must not be swept under the carpet. Via the networking they are supposed to set up, the work of the Councils should allow a better understanding of these differences and an assessment of their implications. Based on this, the Councils could contribute to the promotion and dissemination of positive experiences, with a special focus on the interaction between IVET and CVET and their mutual consistency. They also have the mission of clarifying the institutional framework, guiding the activities of training service providers already operating on a European scale.

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