

European Training Foundation. Recast

2007/0163(COD) - 19/11/2008 - Commission communication on Council's position

The Commission states that the common position is, in substance and to a large extent, in line with the Commission's proposal and therefore can be supported fully.

It is the result of intense inter-institutional negotiations. Informal and technical meetings have pinpointed avenues for compromise on a number of outstanding issues: thematic remit, functions, legal basis, geographical scope, budgetary implications, composition of the Governing board and procedure for appointing the director of the ETF.

The main subjects of negotiation on which an agreement had been reached were the following:

- **The thematic remit:** the ETF recast foresees a wider perception of training in the context of a lifelong learning as a key factor for the development of economies and knowledge societies in accordance with the Lisbon objectives. Moreover, the recast regulation would allow the ETF to assume a leading role in the reform of vocational education and training (VET) and related labour market issues in partner countries as part of a wider programme of **Human Capital Development (HCD)**.
- **The functions:** the introduction of the new external relations policy instruments, which are designed to help partner countries achieve reforms in different sectors, marks a significant step towards policy driven rather than programme-driven approach to external assistance. In this context the ETF needs a mandate that allows it to fully play its role as a centre of expertise assisting both partner countries and European Commission in the development of policies and appropriate reform strategies. The ETF will assist the partner countries in capacity building and in the definition and implementation of reform strategies adapted to the national context. Moreover, the ETF will promote networking and exchange of experiences and good practices between the EU and partner countries and among partner countries themselves.
- **Legal basis:** the Commission's proposal replaces the previously used Article 235 of the Treaty establishing the European Community by Article 150 as ETF remains closely related to the EU policy in vocational education and training (VET). This legal basis provides more clarity in the work and functions of the ETF. Nevertheless, VET needs to be understood not in its traditional sense but in the global context of a lifelong learning policy, including aspects such as labour-market issues, social inclusion and civic participation. In this sense, Article 150 provides a sufficient legal basis for the work of the ETF within its new broader thematic remit.
- **Geographical scope:** the ETF maintains its geographical focus in accession and neighbouring countries of the EU through the Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). However, the new regulation also provides the ETF with the possibility to operate in other regions, in accordance with EU external relations priorities and on the basis of an ad hoc decision taken by the ETF Governing Board on proposal from the Commission.
- **Budgetary implications:** this proposal does not introduce any new activities for the ETF. Its objective is rather to provide for an updated and clearer definition of ETF's current functions, under a wider thematic remit and a renewed geographical scope. There are not budgetary implications, however, the new focus on information and policy analysis tasks is a labour intensive work and requires an important investment on behalf of the ETF in terms of staff training and qualification.

As regards the two remaining issues, the position of the Commission is as follows:

1. **Composition of the Governing Board:** although the Commission regrets that its original position on the issue has not been accepted by Council and Parliament (six representatives of Member States and six representatives of the Commission) it can accept the compromise solution consisting of one representative per Member State, three representatives of the Commission and three non voting experts from the European Parliament, as well as three representatives of partner countries as observers;
2. **Procedure for appointing the director of the ETF:** the Commission can accept the proposal that the candidate selected by the Governing Board would be invited for a hearing by the competent committee/s of the European Parliament.

The Common Position meets the aims of the Commission's initial proposal. The Commission therefore supports the text. Since the two co-legislators have reached a political agreement on the Common Position, 2nd reading proceedings of Parliament in accepting the Council's Common Position should be concluded relatively swiftly.