

# European Training Foundation: budget and finances, access to documents (amend. Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90)

2002/0171(CNS) - 19/12/2006 - Follow-up document

This report is presented under Article 17 of the Council Regulation establishing the European Training Foundation ("the ETF"), and aims to provide an overview of experience acquired in the work of the ETF for the period 2002-2005. It takes into account changes in the geographical coverage, operating environment and role of the ETF since 2000, and draws on the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluator's report provided by ITAD, the external contractor. The report also takes into consideration the evolution of EU policy towards third countries, and expected changes in EU policy instruments after 2006. The current external assistance programmes (Phare, Tacis, Meda and Cards), which define the scope of the ETF's activities, will be replaced in 2007 by three new external assistance instruments, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). These changes require an adaptation of the ETF's founding regulation. The findings from the external evaluation process will inform the proposed amendment of the Council Regulation on the ETF. It is recalled that the Agency's overall objective is to contribute to the development of vocational training systems in the four regions within its remit: the Caucasus and Central Asia, the acceding and candidate countries, the potential candidate countries, and the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Beneficiary countries are known as "partner countries".

**Current priorities and activities:** on an operational level, the ETF uses three main instruments: support to EC programmes and dissemination of EU policies; capacity building, information and analysis for the partner countries; innovation, learning and development, including pilot projects which analyse lessons learned during the application of reform strategies by partner countries.

## **Main recommendations of the external evaluation:**

- the report argued for some increased flexibility in **the ETF's geographical remit**. This would allow ETF's particular expertise to be used by the Community in countries at comparable stages of development and facing similar socio-economic challenges. The Commission shares to a large extent the analysis and recommendations of the evaluators, in particular on the thematic remit of the agency. The growing importance of the lifelong learning approach to education and training in the policies and instruments of the EU calls for a wider thematic remit of the ETF. The Commission proposes to address this issue in the upcoming revision of the ETF Regulation by broadening its mandate;

- the Commission considers that the ETF, which has limited resources, should maintain its geographical focus. It is therefore proposed that the ETF's primary scope be defined by reference to the IPA and to the ENPI. In order to ensure the possibility of using the ETF's expertise in areas falling outside its primary geographical scope, such as the Central Asian countries, it is proposed that a relevant ad hoc decision be taken by the ETF Governing Board on proposal from the Commission;

- a key issue arising from the report is to ensure a close link between ETF pilot actions and larger scale EC funded actions, or actions which could be funded by other donors;

- the evaluation report paid attention to the need to raise the ETF's capacity to monitor its activities at project and country level. In this respect, the report recognised that the monitoring of ETF achievements at

country level is a complex area. The ETF's work is more about facilitating the flow of information rather than about producing products or outputs. The main challenge for the ETF is to monitor not simply the production of a particular document, but to measure the impact produced on national plans and reform actions. The evaluation concluded that the ETF's current monitoring system, which is designed to track performance at the level of activities and individual projects, did not adequately measure the quality of the ETF's services/products or the ETF's impact on VET reform at country level. The Commission asks the ETF to develop a relevant monitoring system;

- with regard to governance structures, the evaluators note particularly that, although the **Governing Board** does fulfil its primary role, there are questions regarding its effective role in strategic decision making. On the Advisory Forum, the report felt that the latter falls short of its purpose of providing advice to the Governing Body on the future Work Programme;

- the communication and dissemination system had greatly improved since the last evaluation. The report showed that ETF's communications initiatives, and in particular its website, workshops and exchange visits, newsletter printed publications (80%) were very effective.

**Conclusion:** the Commission shares the evaluator's overall positive assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the ETF's work and considers that the Agency has made a valuable contribution to the Community's activities in the field of vocational education and training and labour market reform in the partner regions. The ETF has to look at its planning cycle. In particular, it is asked to analyse how the links between 'the mid-term priorities – the annual work programme – the country plans – the annual activity report' can be reinforced and be made more explicit. Relevant measurable indicators should be defined in order to facilitate the follow-up of the set objectives and goals and to ease the assessment of the ETF's impact in its areas of intervention. New approaches should be explored to improve the development and appropriate dissemination of relevant VET material, and to strengthen the ETF's capacity to communicate its achievements and results.

The introduction of the new external aid instruments, the IPA and the ENPI, marks a significant step towards a policy-driven rather than programme-driven approach to external assistance in a sector-wide perspective. Both instruments are designed to provide support towards the achievement by partner countries of home-grown reforms in the sectors concerned. The objectives are defined by a process of dialogue with partner country governments and support is provided to them for the implementation of reform processes designed and managed by them.

In this new context, the ETF will increasingly be required to provide the Commission with information and analysis at the policy development and programming phase. The other focus of attention has to be in helping partner countries to build the capacity to define and implement indigenous reform strategies, and in promoting networking and exchange of experience and good practice between the EU and the partner countries and among partner countries themselves.

The ETF should adapt its organisation and its way of working to this new environment. The agency must in coordination with the Governing Board and the Commission establish clear priorities and concentrate its available resources on its core activities.

For both the Commission and the ETF, increased awareness and monitoring of the type of services both offered and needed will be required in order to ensure that the activities of the Agency continue to be useful and relevant. This implies that the Commission should keep the ETF fully informed on new or revised priorities or strategies. Similarly, the ETF should keep Commission services, in the field and at headquarters, fully informed of its operations, initiatives and contacts with relevant stakeholders in partner countries, other international donors and agencies in order to ensure coherence and visibility of EC action. This demands a renewed commitment from both sides to strong communication and exchange.

The ETF's management must continue its effort to establish a clear vision within the Agency of its position and role as a European centre of expertise in the new institutional landscape. Overall, the Commission believes that the external evaluation report provides useful lessons and recommendations for the development of the ETF as a centre of expertise. The Commission invites the ETF to submit a draft Action Plan to the Governing Board, outlining its analysis and proposed actions on all recommendations made by the evaluator and by the Commission in this report.

The Commission proposal for a revised regulation of ETF will also provide the opportunity for discussion and exchange with the European Parliament and the Council on the future role of the ETF, its objectives and priorities, and its governance structure.