

**European Social Partners Conference on the European Credit system for
Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)
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Opening Speech

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Dear guests, dear participants to the ECVET Social Partners Conference, welcome to Thessaloniki, welcome to Cedefop.

The “European Social Partners Conference on ECVET” is organised by Cedefop in cooperation with the German (BDA – German Confederation of Employers Organisations and DGB – Confederation of German Trade Unions) and European (ETUC – European Trade Union Confederation and UNICE – The Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederations of Europe) Social Partners and is an active contribution to the ongoing public consultation process launched by the Commission on 15 November 2006 and taking place in all Member States.

A joint European strategy for transparency, comparability, transfer and recognition

Among the priorities set in Copenhagen and in Maastricht in 2002 and 2004 - **jointly** by the EU Member States, the candidate and EEA countries, the European social partners and the Commission - were to urgently develop the European Qualifications Framework and the European Credit system for VET.

The purpose of this was to promote transparency, comparability, transfer and recognition of qualifications and competences between different countries and levels of qualifications and thus to provide a common currency through which all national and sectoral qualifications and competences could be compared, valued and converted.

Thanks to a lot of effort and commitment from everybody involved, not least the European social partners, we are now making real progress in this field:

- the Recommendation on the EQF is progressing rapidly through the Council, where a general approach was already agreed. The Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee will discuss it fully in spring 2007 and the adoption is foreseen under the Portuguese presidency, by the end of 2007.
- in November 2006, the European Commission launched the consultation process on the ECVET.

This commitment and progress was reflected in the Helsinki Communiqué of December 2006 where ministers, social partners and the Commission strongly emphasised the need to keep up momentum in this field.

ECVET - A key instrument for citizens

ECVET plays a particularly important role in this **joint** strategy developed from 2002 onwards. While referring to and depending on the levels and learning outcomes defined by the EQF, ECVET should become the practical tool making it possible for individuals to transfer and accumulate learning outcomes across geographical and institutional borderlines.

This implies that ECVET must be designed and implemented in a way which makes it easy to understand, access and use. If this is not the case, the added value of ECVET will be lost. This has been a main concern of the Working Group responsible for the technical aspects underpinning the consultation document launched in November and explains why it has taken several years of intensive work to get where we are today. This is also the reason why the proposal now has been put out for public and Europe-wide consultation.

This effort may prove to be well spent. Initial discussions and tests have showed that this tool - which was requested primarily for application in formal learning, particularly to support the mobility of young people – may have a much wider use. It should, in fact, serve as a tool to promote lifelong learning.

The concrete objectives of ECVET

ECVET is conceptualised as a *system for the accumulation and transfer of credit points in vocational education and training*, enabling the documentation and certification of learning success gained in the course of vocational education and training across geographical and institutional borderlines. While other speakers will go into detail on this, I just would like to mention the three main usages of the instrument:

- in particular, it is targeting the *borders of national systems of vocational education and training*: learners having spent certain training periods in another European country will thus be given the opportunity to have them recognised as part of their training in their home country;
- another feature is the promotion of *mobility of learners within a particular education system*, i.e. to ensure *both vertical and horizontal permeability* between sub-systems and in particular between vocational and higher education in Europe;
- finally, it will be of benefit to learners *outside the education system*: Since the ECVET also considers the results of informal learning (including on-the-job learning) it will ensure their recognition as far as provided by national legislation.

From the description of the basic elements and functioning of the ECVET, existing tools - like the EUROPASS - should be developed in such a way that they can support the ECVET.

The consultation process

The consultation has been launched because of this need to turn the proposal into an understandable, accessible and user-friendly instrument. This can only be achieved by actively involving the wide range of national and sectoral actors and stakeholders, for example in reflecting on which agreements and conventions are needed, which information and guidance is needed and which administrative support is needed.

Those present here today will play a particularly important role in this consultation (and development) process. It is because of the commitment and support of the Social Partners – in Copenhagen, Maastricht and Helsinki - that ECVET has come this far. This mirrors that employees' mobility and lifelong learning is an essential factor not only in promoting the economic integration of Europe but also in developing a knowledge-based European society through mutual learning.

However, we should not hide that EVET reflects our failure to facilitate exchange of apprentices and learners in Europe – at least if we base our judgement on quantitative flows and in particular if we compare with the positive situation academic education.

Drawing upon the approach adopted by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

The consultation process will be actively supported by experiments, further tests and pilot projects under the *Leonardo da Vinci* programme. At the end of the consultation process and during the subsequent phase, the European Commission, actively supported by Cedefop, will ensure that the work carried out on ECVET will be enhanced and expanded through the development of, for example, a “tool box” or a system user guide.

Cedefop will give high priority to supporting the different stakeholders involved in the consultation process. This is in line with our very active involvement – from the very start in 2002 – in developing the ECVET proposal. Cedefop played a key role by providing support and expertise to the Technical Working Group and also by launching two studies (European approaches to credit transfer systems in VET and European reference levels for education and training: promoting credit transfer and mutual trust) which have proven to be of great importance for the conceptual development of ECVET.

The results of the consultation process will be analysed with a view to creating the practical and user-friendly tool referred to above. A major European conference will be held in June 2007 under the German Presidency. This conference will close the consultation process and advice the Commission on how to take forward the work.

This Conference will be an excellent opportunity for the main VET stakeholders from all over Europe to discuss the objectives and structure of the ECVET, and the key role it plays in the achievement of the Lisbon agenda.