

**Introductory address by Dr Dorn at the Cedefop ECVET Conference in
Thessaloniki on 12 February 2007**

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations or BDA, and of BusinessEurope, formerly UNICE, I would like to extend to all of you a warm welcome to this joint European Social Partners Conference on ECVET.

We, the BDA and the Confederation of German Trade Unions or DGB, together with BusinessEurope, the ETUC and Cedefop, decided to hold a joint European event on ECVET because the development of a European credit points system in vocational education and training is of particular relevance to the social partners as key players in the vocational education and training system. The specific design of ECVET is of particular interest to employers and employees alike. Moreover, the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union imposes a particular responsibility on the German social partners to deal with European education and training issues. This is why the conference concluding the ECVET consultation process will be held in Munich in June 2007.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cedefop for organising this event and for their close collaboration during preparations. I would also like to thank all my colleagues for taking part in this conference.

The European Commission launched the process of consultation on ECVET last November. In view of their central role, the social partners have also been asked to respond. We all have a key role to play in the implementation of a European credit points system, and we should point this out in the consultation process. It is only when professional practitioners consider a European credit points system in vocational education and training to be useful, and above all actually use it, that the objectives being pursued – such as increasing mobility and improving transparency and comparability between and within the education and training systems – can actually be attained. It is therefore important that here at this event we provide the

social partners with a platform to exchange views and to conduct discussions with the experts who practice in this field.

We shall take as our central themes the objectives, design and implementation of ECVET. In so doing, we shall clarify the intersections and differences between our appraisals of ECVET. Various representatives of the European social partners will examine the concept presented by the European Commission, particularly with regard to its workability, and will discuss possible repercussions of its implementation in the individual Member States.

The objectives of ECVET are ambitious. In the view of the BDA and BusinessEurope perhaps even too ambitious in its present form as envisaged in the consultation paper: ECVET is intended to foster transparency, comparability, transfer, recognition and mobility in equal measure. It is barely possible for a single instrument to deal with such a wide-ranging challenge.

The European Qualifications Framework or EQF already makes it possible to compare educational qualifications and the underlying competences across the borders of the Member States, and thus improves mobility among young people in Europe. German industry supports the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union in its endeavours to solve the last remaining problems in order to achieve the appropriate recommendations of the Council and European Parliament and in order to begin implementation under the German Presidency.

However, most of us, in other words experts from undertakings and business sectors in Germany, like the European employers' representatives, are critical of the consultation paper put forward by the European Commission, even though we support the fundamental need for a credit points system – recognising achievements and thus enhancing comparability. We question the benefits of an ECVET system in which each country can develop its own credit logic and can award a different number of credits for a comparable qualification and/or competence and in which, moreover, there are no recognisable ways of linking up with the ECTS credit points system for the university sector. Similarly, we believe it will be relatively difficult to implement the ECVET proposal in practice. ECVET is regarded as an independent

instrument alongside the EQF and is merely intended to be geared towards the EQF. However, it should also supplement it and form a homogeneous entity. And, above all, it must offer added value to users.

This could be the case if ECVET, acting together with the EQF as a quantitative auxiliary descriptor, makes it easier to recognise competences already acquired, regardless of country or learning context. Then, ECVET could not only increase international mobility but also mobility between vocational education and training and universities. A basic requirement here is compatibility between ECVET and ECTS, the universities' credit points system. Employers at European level are doing their best to ensure that in the medium term, the Bologna Process in higher education and the Copenhagen Process in vocational education and training are brought together.

In implementing ECVET, we should be guided by the principle of voluntary action, in other words, no new statutory rules should be created. Instead, we must reach a situation where the legal requirement for further learning is not a specific certificate but that the institution accepting a student assesses the actual competences of applicants using transparent criteria, which could also include credit points.

We should not rush into anything when developing and voting on ECVET. The current consultation process allows very little time – by way of comparison, the consultation process on the EQF took almost two months more. In addition, there was a clear proposal on the EQF, while at present ECVET is little more than an idea. This provides us with an opportunity to shape this idea, but this takes time, at any rate much more than five months. ECVET should therefore first enter a test phase.

I hope we can have lively discussions on this matter. Two weeks ago, we, the German social partners, exchanged views on this topic in Berlin at a joint BDA/DGB workshop on ECVET. In Berlin, as is also the case here in Thessaloniki, we provided the social partners with a platform encouraging an all-important dialogue on this topic. We would like the conclusions reached in both Berlin and Thessaloniki to

influence the European consultation process so they can continue to bear fruit in the subsequent European discussion.

Thank you for your attention!