

## **Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean**

### **Communication**

#### **on the first Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Technical and Vocational Education and Training Marseilles, 18 December 2008**

1. The first Euro-Med Forum on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) was held on 18 December 2008 in Marseille **under the co-presidency of Mr Rachid Mohamed Rachid, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and Mr Laurent Wauquiez, Minister of State for Employment of the French Republic.** The event was organised as part of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

2. **The Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean held on 13 July 2008 emphasised the importance of vocational education in the region** in these terms: “Particular attention should be paid to enhancing quality and to ensuring the relevance of vocational training to labour market needs.” The Marseille Euro-Med Forum, whose purpose is to assess the state of vocational education in the Mediterranean Area today, is fully in line with that approach. It also reflects the focus of the **first Euro-Med Ministerial Conference on Labour and Employment that took place in Marrakech on 9 and 10 November 2008.** Finally, the Forum should be seen as a continuation of the discussions held at the Euro-Med Conference of Ministers for Industry on 5 and 6 November; the Ministerial Conference of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean on 3 and 4 November; and the Euro-Med Ministerial Conference on Health of 17 November 2008.

### **Technical and Vocational Education and Training in UfM countries: a decisive economic and social challenge with major regional scope**

3. The participants in the Euro-Med Forum on Technical and Vocational Education and Training of 18 December stressed **the challenges involved in updating and upgrading the training systems in the region.**

- Vocational education is a key component in the drive to modernise, diversify and develop the various UfM economies. Updating and upgrading vocational education should make it easier for the countries in the region to find appropriate ways of fitting into international value chains, of leveraging growth in world trade and capturing an increasing share of foreign direct investment flows.

- More efficient vocational education can be a major boon to the European Union's UfM partners as they seek to respond to the demographic and social challenges facing them. With population pressure mounting and the working-age population expanding rapidly, massive job creation has become essential if those countries are to reduce poverty, meet the aspirations of their young people and maintain social stability.

- Vocational education has therefore taken on major regional scope; it is key to deepening economic and industrial complementarities between countries in the European Union and partner countries in the Mediterranean Basin. It can drive economic and social convergence throughout the Euro-Mediterranean Area by furthering competitive strength, business performance and innovation in a global economy, as well as equity, cohesion, personal development and active citizenship.

4. The participants in the Euro-Med Forum on Technical and Vocational Education and Training of 18 December **agreed that in their current format, the systems of initial and continuing vocational education in the region could gain by being improved to better rise the challenge** of achieving an adequate fit between labour supply and the needs of both the firms and the economic sectors. Underpinning that judgment were the following observations, with special emphasis on the countries along the southern rim of the Mediterranean:

- Training on offer is not always designed in collaboration with the representatives of the economic sectors and therefore does not often meet their needs ;
- Financial priorities within the educational systems mostly favour higher education rather than professionalizing education ;
- Financial mechanisms do not permit a real allocation of the funds collected for vocational training ;
- Professionalizing education is still often considered as a secondary way designed for people excluded from the academic educational system, and vocational training is rather poorly reputed.
- The labour market is highly segmented. An informal sector provides unskilled workers with mainly precarious, relatively unproductive jobs that rarely serve as a stepping stone to higher qualifications, while a public and private formal sector affords workers a high degree of protection, but generates too few jobs to be able to absorb the growing ranks of educated young people – who may not even be considered employable by many employers.
- Investment in programmes targeting holders of academic higher degrees has proved relatively ineffective at a time in which the latter are having trouble finding jobs and are leaving their home countries in large numbers.

### **The need to deepen vocational education and training reforms in the Mediterranean Area**

5. The participants hailed **the reforms undertaken by several of the region's countries over the past decade** to upgrade their technical and vocational education and training systems. However, there was **broad agreement about the ongoing weaknesses of vocational education** in the UfM countries that are partners to the European Union:

- Vocational training is still widely thought of as a second-tier education or, at best, as a catch-up solution for those who failed to get an initial diploma.

- The range of training programmes on offer is characterised by insufficient structure, diversification and evaluation, and is only moderately effective in meeting the skill needs of local labour markets.

- Too little has been done to extend the benefits of vocational training to businesses in the informal economy, which is significant in the countries on the southern rim of the

Mediterranean. The end effect has been to restrict access to continuing education programmes by both the least qualified workers and small and medium-sized enterprises.

- The procedures required for adult education and validation of work experience are still inadequately developed in most countries in the region.

6. The Euro-Med Forum on Technical and Vocational Education and Training offered an opportunity to highlight **the main points in what could be an agenda for reforming vocational education in the Mediterranean basin countries** with the aim of making it both more attractive to the relevant target groups (young people in initial education programmes and wage- and salary-earners) and more efficient in economic and social terms:

- Acquisition of a fundamental base of knowledge by the end of compulsory schooling should be a requirement, since it helps students assimilate the content of vocational programmes more effectively, whether they are part of initial or continuing education.

- While accommodating national specificities, the approach to governance and regulation of the training systems in the region should become more comprehensive and more collaborative. Local government authorities, businesses and employer and employee representatives should all play a part in synergy in identifying the skills and qualifications needed by the local economy, developing training programmes and the related qualification paths, and managing and evaluating State vocational education systems.

- Vocational training institutions should be granted significant autonomy in areas such as teaching methods, the shaping of curricula, links to the business world and diversification of funding sources.

- Funding sources should be diversified and balanced in such a way as to foster the emergence of a competitive market for vocational education, one that encompasses both public and private-sector organisations. Decisions as to where to focus funding should be guided at least in part by exacting assessments of educational outcomes.

- Changes in governance of vocational education systems should be buttressed by appropriate procedures for classifying qualifications as precisely as possible to ensure internal consistency between programmes (with national certification systems becoming increasingly widespread); guaranteeing the quality of all programmes, including through shared procedures for recognising skills and qualifications (certification and quality assurance); validating non-

formal on-the-job learning, even if acquired in the informal economy (accreditation of experiential learning); and establishing regular refresher courses for teaching staff.

### **The relevance of a regional approach to the issue of vocational education**

7. The Euro-Med Forum on Technical and Vocational Education and Training made it possible to **outline a regional agenda for vocational education**. A regional approach to vocational education issues could focus on the following two points:

- **A regional vision of training needs and resources could be developed** in relation with professional organizations using forecasts as to the positions and qualifications needed in the short-to-medium term, both in each partner country and in the Euro-Mediterranean Area as a whole. The issue of the permanent regulation between training supply and demand should be tackled.

- **Experience and best practices could be systematically shared**. This would involve peer review arrangements, and therefore periodic progress reports to evaluate the growth and upgrading of vocational training systems in the UfM member countries. Such an approach would also require working consistently to develop indicators and collect data on vocational education in the relevant countries.<sup>1</sup>

- **Efforts in the field of training could be pooled**, for example by establishing regional training platforms in the areas covered by the six key initiatives listed at the Paris Summit and, more specifically, by the three priority projects singled out at the Joint ECOFIN and FEMIP Ministerial Meeting of 7 October 2008 in Luxembourg – De-pollution of the Mediterranean, Maritime and Land Highways, and the Mediterranean Solar Plan.

- **Occupational mobility across the Euro-Mediterranean Area could be promoted**. Labour mobility is essential to strengthening the qualifications and competencies of workers in UfM countries, provided that the concerns of countries with high immigration or emigration rates are taken into consideration. This mobility could be facilitated by creating regional transfer arrangements that would ensure mutual recognition for qualifications and competencies between UfM countries (e.g. procedures for transferring, building on and crediting knowledge gained in apprenticeships; a regional framework for certifying training

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<sup>1</sup> To this end, the expertise of the European Training Foundation and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) could be drawn on more extensively.

and learning outcomes; a regional pass system based on uniform classification of qualifications). It could also be beneficial if the European Union were to share the considerable expertise it has built up in this area through the Copenhagen Process with its UfM partners.

**- Efforts could be stepped up to coordinate financing and initiatives** for upgrading vocational education systems under development aid programmes deployed in the region (in keeping with the principles and plan of action set forth in the Paris Declaration on the Efficiency of Development Aid of 2 March 2005).

8. The conclusions that were drawn from the December 18 Forum stressed the fact that this event had to be the first in a series of regular “meetings” dealing with vocational training in the Mediterranean area. Problems in the modernization of the vocational training systems of the UfM will have to be mentioned and evaluated by experts, practitioners and people in charge with technical education and vocational training. Progresses will be noted too. The status and the nature of these meetings will have to be defined, but the improvements they should bring should both make the systems more efficient and give them a better reputation.