



## **Certifying vocational skills in Kosovo: establishing first institutions**

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**A primary institution-building project supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
in cooperation with the European Training Foundation.**

## Preamble

The certification of skills' project forms part of a wider institution and capacity building programme for the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in Kosovo. Financed by the Danish Government and executed through a number of implementation partners, the programme addresses systems and management development of vocational training services.

Danish expertise for the programme was supplemented with expertise and technical assistance from the European Training Foundation through a cooperation agreement between the ETF and the Danish authorities and executed by way of a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Association of Danish Production Schools.<sup>1</sup>

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1 ETF contribution to the project is defined by its regulation: coordination of assistance and joint projects Council Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90 of 7 May 1990 establishing a European Training Foundation. Articles. 1 and 3 (c).

## Table of contents

<i>Preamble</i>	.....2
<i>Table of contents</i>	.....3
<i>Executive summary</i>	.....4
1. Introduction	.....5
2. Problem and rationale	.....6
3. Aim and objectives	.....7
4. Certification framework prior to project engagement	.....8
5. Implementation arrangements	.....9
6. Outputs, achievements, impact	.....10
7. Engaging local partners	.....12
8. Cooperation with international partners	.....13
9. Constraints	.....14
10. Impact on wider policy concerns	.....15
11. Sustainability	.....16
12. Recommendations	.....17

### Annexes

1. ETF/Danish Memorandum of Understanding
2. Report from the stakeholder consensus building meeting
3. Interim National Skills Board and beyond: declaration of stakeholders
4. Establishing an Interim National Skills Board for Kosovo: Memorandum of Understanding
5. Terms of reference – Vocational Standards Committees
6. Terms of reference – Interim National Skills Board
7. Interim National Skills Board – draft log-frame matrix

## **Executive summary**

Skilled manpower will be an essential ingredient in Kosovo's efforts to rebuild its economy and meet the growing competitive pressures as it joins mainstream market developments in the region and wider Europe. Providing quality training to labour market entrants, the unemployed and existing workforce will be important in the bid to ensure that knowledge and skills are available to meet new demands from employers. To this end, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs fielded a team of experts to assist the Kosovar authorities in staff development and primary institution building of its vocational training services, including first steps in developing certification of vocational education and training.

The objective of the certification project was to establish common interest and consensus for the creation of a public skills' certification system and to draw up an integrated framework for certifying vocational education and training in Kosovo.

The project built on earlier work undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for development of vocational training in adult training centres which concluded that a 'one-system' certification framework should be established addressing vocational skills promoted by the education and labour authorities.

The project involved an intensive series of consultations, dialogue, discussions and task-oriented groups involving the key stakeholders to manpower development in Kosovo: education, employment, trade and industry ministries, social partners and civic society.

The results of the dialogue and planning process were submitted to a high-level, decision-making group comprising key representatives of all stakeholder organisations. The key outcomes of the high level decision-making group were as follows:

- a) agreement on establishment of an Interim National Skills' Board for Kosovo;
- b) creation of 8 Vocational Standards Committees (selected economic sectors);
- c) agreement to the eventual establishment of a permanent national skills board.

The report provides an overview of the concept development and consensus-building process involving local and international partners. It includes detailed technical annexes for the establishment of the Interim National Skills Board, including Vocational Standards Committees.

The wider impact of the project is then considered with particular reference to labour market integration of returnees and social partnership.

Sustainability of the project efforts is then addressed where further financial and technical support is recommended.

The report concludes with recommendations for continued local and international cooperation on the ground to support the development of the Interim National Skills Board with more concentrated efforts for institution building to support wider manpower development in Kosovo.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In August 2002, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of Kosovo requested the technical support and expertise of the European Training Foundation for the development of a national certification system for vocational skills in Kosovo. It was further proposed that the development work interface and compliment wider institution-building efforts within the labour and employment sector supported by the Danish Government.
- 1.2 In April 2003, the European Training Foundation and the Association of Danish Production Schools (service provider supporting vocational training in Kosovo) agreed within a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperateto meet the request ofthe Kosovar authorities.
- 1.3 This paper completes the work of the European Training Foundation as defined in the Memorandum of Understanding.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.4 The contents of the paper and its structure are designed to
  - a) satisfy the administrative conditions of the reporting requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding, and
  - b) provide a full, hand-over document to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare on whose request the project was initiated, including key materials and intelligence which were developed through the project.
- 1.5 The paper provides sufficient detail on the overall operations and results from the project. Fuller detail, if necessary, is available in the technical annexes and papers attached to the report.
- 1.4 The report is structured as follows. Firstly, it establishes the rationale for the project set against the policy and institutional framework that existed at the outset ofthe exercise.
- 1.5 Secondly, it summarises the implementation arrangements of the project and details the achievements and deliverables, including constraints and corrective measures taken. Fuller technical detail on the project, including stakeholder cooperation protocols, project descriptions and terms of reference are included as annexes to the report.
- 1.6 Thirdly, the paper considers the involvement and contribution of local and international partners to the project.
- 1.7 Fourthly, the impact of the project on wider policy concerns for Kosovo is considered.
- 1.8 Finally, the report assesses the sustainability of the project with follow-up proposals.
- 1.9 The report concludes with a number of operational and policy recommendations.

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<sup>2</sup> Article 1(3) Memorandum of Understanding. ETF and ADPS. April 2003.

## **2. Problem and rationale**

- 2.1 With the establishment of a first post-war government and a policy shift from emergency to development strategy, the Kosovar authorities are now giving special consideration to the development of institutions as part of the wider effort of public services in establishing a supportive framework for the developing market economy.
- 2.2 Public vocational training services can make an important contribution to competitiveness of enterprises and are central to efforts to enhance employability. But here there are a number of concerns:
- relevance and applicability of training vis-à-vis real labour market needs;
  - quality of training being delivered by training providers operating in Kosovo;
  - confidence of the general public, and particularly, employers in the contents and standards of training being delivered.
- 2.3 In their efforts to establish a modern and market-responsive skills' support environment, key stakeholders to workforce development will be required to establish a central system for standards and certification of training delivered by statutory training providers, including partner organisations private and voluntary sectors.

### **3. Aim and objective of project**

3.1 The aim of the project was to bring forward vocational training reform in Kosovo which is essentially bottom-up and locally based at a number of training centers and vocational schools to a second level: creation of sustainable institutions to support manpower development in Kosovo.

3.2 The project has two objectives:

- establish a consensus across a range of stakeholders as to the importance of establishing an integrated skills' assessment and certification system in Kosovo;
- introduction of an interim certification system for adult vocational training centers and vocational education schools.

#### **4. Assessment of certification framework prior to project engagement**

- 4.1 Prior to the project implementation, there was no formal certification of vocational skills in Kosovo.
- 4.2 Following the war many NGOs arrived in Kosovo and delivered vocational training in a range of different occupations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was concerned as to the labour market relevance of the vocational training of non-statutory training providers and the quality of training being delivered.
- 4.3 This in turn, prompted the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to reflect on:
  - a) the relevance, quality and standards of training provided to adults through its own network of donor-supported training centers, and to be transferred to the statutory authorities (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare) due course; and
  - b) formal certification arrangements for vocational training which would be necessary in the medium-term.
- 4.4 As a first step in determining how assessment and certification of vocational training should be approached by the network of training centres falling within its the remit, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare engaged all training centres and international partners (ADSP, ILO, AOF) into a structured dialogue and development process with the objective of determining how assessment and certification practice across the network could be harmonized with a view to establishing a common system for assessment and certification of publicly funded vocational training.
- 4.5 Following a series of exchange visits between vocational staff from the adult training centres where curriculum, assessment tools and methods and certification processes were examined, a working group comprising vocational training center staff, international technical experts and Ministry officials held a workshop in April 2002. The objective of the workshop was to determine how assessment and certification of vocational training within the Ministry of Labour's network of training centres could be more strategically developed.
- 4.6 The primary recommendation of the workshop was that a concerted effort would be required by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in developing policy and practice for assessment and certification of vocational training delivered through its statutory services. In particular, a central level policy framework for assessment and certification would need to be put in place backed up with interim supporting institutions that could eventually be developed into more permanent structures.
- 4.7 Secondly, the working group recommended policy and operational guidelines for assessment and certification of vocational training elaborated on four levels: trainees, instructors, vocational training courses and training providers. These should be developed by way of pilot measures to determine how assessment and certification processes, including linkages between the various players, could be managed to maximum benefit.
- 4.8 Thirdly, the working group recommended that given links between vocational education, vocational training and wider training being delivered in the enterprise sector, a dialogue and planning mechanism should be considered with a view to developing a more global skills' certification and qualifications' structure for Kosovo, possibly borrowing on the experience acquired from the pilot actions of the adult training services.

## 5. Implementation arrangements

- 5.1 The project was implemented between 1 May 2003 and 31 October 2003.
- 5.2 The expert was hosted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare who formed part of a core team of local and international staff working at the Ministry's headquarters in Pristina: local staff (4), international staff (3).
- 5.3 The project involved an intensive series of meetings, workshops organized through a cross-stakeholder working team (CERT Group) and a planning sub-group. The CERT Group was also assisted by international and local partners. The discussion and recommendations from CERT Group set the agenda for the expert in terms of priorities, tasks and deliverables.
- 5.4 CERT Group composition was as follows:

### *Key stakeholders*

- BSPK: Confederation of Trade Unions of Kosovo;
- OEK: Chamber of Commerce of Kosovo;
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology;
- Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare;
- Ministry of Trade and Industry.

### *International partners (technical assistance offices)*

- Danida: experts involved in the capacity building programme for vocational training;
- Swisscontact: experts from a modular skills development project supported by the Swiss government;
- GTZ: experts from the Ministry of Education's lead agency for vocational education;
- Kosvet: experts from the EU's technical assistance team for developing vocational education and training in Kosovo.

### *Local partners*

- VIS: Italian-supported, local non-governmental organization and vocational training provider for marginalized youth;
- Local staff from vocational schools and training centers, international technical assistance offices

- 5.5 To guard against institutional memory loss, agendas and minutes from all meetings and sub-group meetings, concept papers, protocols and terms of reference providing full detail on the project process, are available on diskette and attached to this report.

## **6. Outputs, achievements, impact**

### **6.1 Consensus on establishment of an Interim National Skills Board**

- 6.1.1 A full consensus was established across the key stakeholder group for the establishment of an integrated skills' assessment and certification system in Kosovo.
- 6.1.2 The consensus building exercise was addressed at two levels: (a) at working level within CERT Group and (b) political level involving decision-makers appointed by Permanent Secretaries from the three stakeholder ministries and the Presidents of both social partner organisations.
- 6.1.3 The key achievement from the group was the recognition and agreement that a single, regulatory framework was required for assessment and certification of vocational education and training.
- 6.1.4 The key outcome of the consensus-building meeting is the agreement to establish a Interim National Interim Skills Board (INSB). A report from the high-level, stakeholder meeting is attached at Annex 2. This details the institutional development agreed upon and includes a consensus table where stakeholders agreed to the rationale, composition, tasks and administration of the Interim Board.
- 6.1.5 A declaration for establishment of an Interim National Skills Board (original in Albanian language and signed by the cross-stakeholder group) is attached at Annex 3. This is being followed up with a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed by relevant Ministers and heads of social partner organizations (Annex 4). To give extra force to the agreement the Ministry of Trade and Industry recommended an interim regulation by 31 March 2004 to apply to the 24 months period for the Interim Board. This was agreed. The MOU has been drafted so as to facilitate the preparation of the interim regulation.

### **6.2 Consensus to the establishment and financing of a permanent National Skills Board**

- 6.2.1 Stakeholders at the consensus-building meeting agreed to the establishment of a permanent skills' certification authority by January 2006.
- 6.2.2 This will be enshrined within a draft regulation to be available by 30 June 2005, for promulgation by December 2005. A concept paper and draft regulation for a permanent skills' board (30 June 2005) will be prepared to include certification and recognition issues to promote mobility of workers in South Eastern Europe.
- 6.2.3 The stakeholders agreed to financially support the Board from their annual budgets. Endorsement by Ministry of Education is still outstanding. Social partners agreed to financial commitment to the Board subject to availability of income.

### **6.3 Certification system: establishment of institutions, working procedures for certification**

- 6.3.1 The project elaborated an interim system for certification.
- 6.3.2 Vocational Standards Committees (VSCs) for 8 economic sectors will be established (2 VSCs already operational in the construction and mechanical engineering sector). Terms of reference for VSCs are attached at Annex 5.
- 6.3.3 All stakeholders have agreed to commit staff/local expertise to the VSCs.

- 6.3.4 Two VSCs have been established during the project period and funding secured for their operations, including capacity building and international study visits.<sup>3</sup>
- 6.3.5 VSCs will establish criteria and standards for vocational courses, vocational training personnel and vocational training organizations and make recommendations to the INSB that will take decisions on certification.
- 6.3.6 Vocational Standards Committees will be required to report to and be administered by the INSB. Draft terms of reference for the INSB are attached at Annex 6. A draft logical framework matrix is attached at Annex 7.
- 6.3.7 Certification of returnees features within the remit of the INSB accredited vocational training institutions.
- 6.3.8 To ensure transparency of all operations of the INSB and VSCs, a procedure for queries and appeals will be established.
- 6.3.9 A public register of accredited training providers will be established.
- 6.3.10 INSB will formulate and administer a public information strategy to include a website.

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<sup>3</sup> GTZ is supporting the VSC Construction. Swisscontact is supporting VSC Mechanical Engineering.

## **7. Engaging local partners**

- 7.1 Intensive local consultation and involvement of all local stakeholders underpinned the concept development process for the INSB and VSCs.
- 7.2 A consensus building workshop with representatives of the key stakeholders (nominated by Ministry permanent secretaries and presidents of the social partners) ensured final consultation and commitment to draft institutional development plans.
- 7.3 The dialogue and institutional concept development was essentially a learning process for all local stakeholders at both levels: CERT Group and high-level decision-makers. Feedback particularly from the high-level stakeholders confirmed the cross-stakeholder, consensus-building meeting as being innovative for decision-making as well as a model to promote cooperation.
- 7.4 As regards the CERT Group, maintaining direction and focus was an uphill task. Two factors in particular dogged the objectives and work of the CERT Group. Firstly, at issue was the institutional ‘tension’ between key ministries. This is ‘normal’ in the circumstances but requires considerable time and energy in establishing common vision, objective and unity of purpose. Facilitation by an external and independent partner was therefore an important factor in getting to cross-institutional consensus.
- 7.5 An issue that compounded the consensus building exercise in the early phase of the project was that the expert was located at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and may not have been considered as completely impartial to the process. The inclusion of an independent facilitator in the high-level consensus-building meeting helped the process.
- 7.6 By the end of the project, both key ministries (education and labour) had arrived at a good understanding and project working relationship. However, the connections at higher level between the ministries will still need external facilitation and promotion particularly as more dialogue and negotiation will be required as the INSB moves forward to more permanent structures.
- 7.7 Credit is due to the social partners. Experience of early transition reform countries generally demonstrates weak social partner contribution to the reform process. Not so, in Kosovo. The champions within the CERT Group were the social partners who quickly understood the issues and their importance to them and their members (enterprises and workers) and who committed themselves early to the new institutional ideas. At times, it was evident that the social partners were becoming impatient with state authorities. But they demonstrated good partnership, cooperation and maintained focus throughout.
- 7.8 An incidental and unexpected outcome of the project itself was that capacity building of local partners was happening in the project process. Apart from the CERT group related activities, a considerable amount of time was spent working individually with stakeholders, awareness raising, coaching and determining reaction to proposals before ‘going public’. Two examples. Firstly, due to concentrated work with BSPK to bring them to a level where they could actively contribute to the CERT process, the President of BSPK requested further capacity building support (outside the project brief). Secondly, the approach, method and materials used for the high-level stakeholder meeting, in particular the ‘key factors by stakeholder’ consensus grid was appreciated by the participants and proposed for use in other consensus building exercises.

## **8. Cooperation with international partners**

- 8.1 The support and interest of a number of international partners was instrumental in building up knowledge on the 'why' and 'how' certification can be introduced in Kosovo. Inputs into meetings from experts from different European countries (D, DK, CH, PL, UK, IRL) working in the ministries (UNMIK staff) and technical assistance teams (GTZ, Swisscontact, Kosvet) involved in vocational training developments allowed for knowledge transfer, access to information and a general international coaching process to the CERT Group's work. This was highly appreciated.
- 8.2 A considerable amount of time was involved in engaging international partner support. This was not easy as all international partners had to adjust their project planning to accommodate the CERT development plans. It was important to keep all international partners on board given the wider interests of Kosovo for quality manpower development. This paid off with international partners committing themselves to financial and technical support for the VSCs.
- 8.3 Further cooperation with international partners will be essential in the institution-building phase. This will require concentrated finance. This matter is addressed at section 11 of the report.

## **9. Constraints on project and measures taken**

- 9.1 A factor which impacted on timing and overall project progress was school holidays. A specific request was made by the Ministry of Education to put back the timing of the project by two months to accommodate teacher holidays in July and August. This resulted in a delay of the same period in the nominations for and establishment of the Vocational Standards Committees.
- 9.2 The capacity building work of the first two VSCs did not get started until October 2003. However, the first results of the Committees activities (study visits to Germany and Switzerland) and reported at CERT Group's meeting on 28 October by GTZ and Swisscontact partners indicated good motivation and interest by both VSCs in their mission.
- 9.3 An additional constraint to this project is that it set with zero budget. This frustrated the most simple of operations (e.g. translation of core materials into Albanian) particularly in the first months when none of the stakeholders assumed any kind of responsibility or ownership for the project. With time, cooperation with both the local and international partners ensured that small costs could be met but a future concept and consensus-building project should be furnished with a small operational/costs budget.
- 9.4 A final factor in the process was an apparent international partner 'rivalry'. Ideally, a future project starting out should determine interest and contribution to international partners in advance. While the project managed to circumvent any great impact on the project itself, a lesson for the future would be to establish a donor-interest meeting at the outset and set the ground rules to guard against difficulties during implementation phase. It might not necessarily work, but it is worth a try.

## **10. Impact of project on wider policy concerns**

- 10.1 There were a number of spin-off implications of the project on wider policy issues.
- 10.2 Firstly, the CERT Group recommended that a special provision be established for returnees – certification of workers returning from abroad and who had received training outside of Kosovo. The objective here is to ensure recognition of the qualifications, skills acquired and facilitate access to the local labour market. Promoting returnees is a major policy concern of UNMIK and the wider international community and this project's realization will directly assist in the reintegration of returnees into economic life.
- 10.3 Secondly, and a related factor, is the implications of the project for Kosovo's cooperation with the EU policy framework for the region of South Eastern Europe (Stabilisation and Association process) and future perspectives for integration into EU structures. The INSB mandate requires the Board to develop a regulation for a permanent institution, one of whose tasks will be approval of vocational qualifications from other jurisdictions. This feature of a future permanent Board's work will directly contribute to institutional cooperation between the Kosovo authority and its counterparts in the region and wider EU while putting in place the building blocks which will facilitate free movement of people (in this context, mobility of labour) which is a primary pillar of the European Union's open market.
- 10.4 Further, the project realization will have direct implications for wider policy and institutional developments in Kosovo. One area is on occupational classification. During the project period, the expert assisted the Ministry of Labour in determining ways forward for the introduction of a market-oriented occupational classification system. Terms of reference were drafted and the project was supported by EAR resulting in new institutional arrangements to get underway between the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, social partners and the Statistics Office of Kosovo. This project is a first and necessary step to the eventual creation of a wider qualifications framework for Kosovo, within which a permanent national skills certification authority will be a central feature.
- 10.5 A key spin-off from the project was that it provided a case study on social dialogue and partnership. A key issue for the government is getting the Tri-Partite Advisory Council to become an effective instrument to Kosovo's development. Progress within the Tri-Partite Advisory Council has been slow. However, the certification project resulted in good social dialogue and partnership in action and demonstrated the value of inclusive planning and development processes. The proposal within the terms of reference for the INSB is that it shall report to the Tri-Partite Advisory Council on a future permanent structure and draft regulation. The example of good cross-stakeholder cooperation and consensus-building could be employed by the Tri-Partite Advisory Council in other sectors.

## 11. Sustainability

- 11.1 Regarding sustainability, the proposals for an Interim National Skills Board and the cross-stakeholder consensus establishes a sound basis for the project to move forward with the creation of an interim certification institution. The stakeholders have also agreed to the creation of a permanent institution within 24 months. Further, the stakeholders understand and have committed themselves to financial support for a permanent skills board<sup>4</sup>. The political will has been established. This is fundamental to sustainability.
- 11.2 A threat to the next phase of the project will be if there is no, one single donor that can support the project. If this is not possible, an alternative arrangement involving micro-funds and technical inputs from local and international sources can be a solution. But this is far from optimum and leaves the institution-building process open to possible competing interests of the range of different benefactors.
- 11.3 Finally, given that the project was cross-stakeholder, the ownership issue was only addressed after the stakeholder consensus meeting. During the project period there was no official or staff member from each of the stakeholders following the dossier on a consistent basis. The off shot of this is that with the departure of the ETF expert, there could be a vacuum in terms of coordination and 'push' affecting sustainability of the project realisation. This was discussed at the CERT Group meeting on 28 October. It was agreed that the CERT Group would continue as a support partner for the INSB and that the Ministries of Education and Labour would assume rotating responsibility for CERT Group coordination (6 monthly rotation) with Ministry of Labour assuming the chair as of 1 January 2004. This in itself will be an extra advantage in promoting greater local commitment, control and ownership of the dossier and should reinforce sustainability.
- 11.4 To further the success of sustainability, the terms of reference for the expert to be contracted for the INSB capacity building exercise should include a monitoring and coaching function until the INSB is well beyond establishment phase.

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<sup>4</sup> Clarification is still required as to the position of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology on financial commitment to the permanent skills board. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and chairperson of the stakeholder consensus building meeting has written to his counterpart in the Ministry of Education asking for clarification.

## **12. Recommendations**

- 12.1 A number of recommendations follow. These apply to local stakeholders and international partners.
- 12.2 Every effort should be made to maintain the momentum and constructive spirit established between the stakeholders in the development of the project. An external facilitator (local or international), possibly provided by one of the international partners already operational on the ground could assist in the process but independence and impartiality (which was an important feature of ETF expertise) is essential.
- 12.3 Every effort should be made to ensure that the developments for certification of vocational skills are tied in with any plans for development of wider qualifications' frameworks, including policy discussions foreseen within the EAR 2002 programme (Kosvet) where policy considerations are expected in April 2004.
- 12.4 Continued efforts should be made to raise the total funds required for INSB start-up. A 'cocktail' of different donations and expertise 'in kind' will be logistically very difficult to manage. The project should not be allowed to be the hostage of goodwill. Every effort should be made to engage one single donor. The Ministry of Labour has been lobbying a number of local EU Member State offices, a good learning exercise in itself. This could pay off.
- 12.5 Beyond certification and considering the wider requirements of Kosovo, inputs from Danish authorities and other partners, including EU, should concentrate on harder institution building. Kosovo authorities are now able to articulate their requirements. And Kosovo is ready for institutions. Softer measures like curriculum development and teacher training can be handled by local funds (and smaller donors) and Kosovo should be encouraged to demonstrate commitment on the national purse which it will have to assume eventually.
- 12.6 The experience established through the project and the results demonstrate the value in terms of expertise, efficiency and effectiveness of direct cooperation between experts from a EU Member State and the European Training Foundation. The Danish/ETF project is a good example and could be followed up with other Member States. The Danish Office should inform the Danish Member of ETF Governing Board of this good practice.