

A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE STATUS AND THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) TRAINERS IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract. This paper is a follow-up to the study “VET trainers in public and private training institutions” (EAC/09/06 Studies on Trainers in Vocational Education and Training: key actors to make lifelong learning a reality in Europe LOT 2) that was commissioned by the European Commission to Research voor Beleid (RvB) & PLATO in 2008. The author of this paper – which focuses on the professionalization processes of VET trainers and instructors working in public training organizations in South-Eastern Europe – was involved in the study as a research expert for a cluster of countries that included Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. The paper looks upon current issues of VET trainers’ career paths, their roles and competencies, their qualification and recruitment processes as well as the varied policies and professional development activities for this group of people, from a comparative perspective. The paper concludes with some recommendations for improving access and working conditions, supporting professional development and raising attractiveness of the profession in this part of Europe.

Keywords: Vocational Education and Training (VET), European policy, South-Eastern Europe, training staff, professional development.

Introduction

Vocational Education and Training (VET) staff plays a key role in making lifelong learning a reality. They are the ones who transfer knowledge, competences and skills to the learners. However, not a lot is known about this particular group of professionals. At the European level, there is a lack of vital information about various aspects of these people, such as how they are recruited, what competences, skills and qualifications they are expected

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to have or required to possess, what their specific roles and tasks are, what their employment status is, how their professional development is organized, how they are assessed and how attractive their profession is. The Maastricht Communiqué (European Commission, 2002a) that reviewed the Copenhagen Declaration (European Commission, 2002b) and the Helsinki Communiqué (European Commission, 2006) underlined the close link between the quality of training and education systems and the quality of education and training staff.

According to RvB & PLATO (2008: 63), VET trainers hold various positions which encompass a wide variety of tasks and roles. They teach, instruct, coach, guide, develop, recommend, stimulate, assess, and so on. They serve audiences of various ages in every phase of their professional lives and in a wide variety of content domains or areas of expertise and competence. In addition to their educational positions and roles, these people have jobs that go beyond training in the sense that they include a lot of counselling and coaching to help people overcome the lack of self-esteem or remorse for lost chances at former jobs. They are also involved in the processes of accreditation of prior learning and experience. Perhaps it is a sign of the still underdeveloped professionalism in the field where there has not been a further differentiation so that each task is performed by those that are good at it (Buiskool *et al.*, 2010).

This is largely echoed in South-Eastern Europe, where the situation of the professional development of VET trainers is more on the downside. Generally speaking, in the majority of South-Eastern European countries, VET is expected to provide professional, individual and social improvement, to address skill development or upgrading, and above all to respond to problems relating to labour market access. A generic appreciation of the situation is that VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe, especially in the present period of economic recession, face obstacles such as dependency on government or EU funding, changing political perspectives on and interest in VET overall, the policies prescribing an enclosed employment-oriented market (sometimes roofed under a tight registry that literally closes VET market rather than guarantee its quality) and, occasionally, the lack of national legislation or frameworks and structures covering their field of practice (Zarifis, 2009).

Following the results of the study “VET trainers in public and private training institutions” (EAC/09/06 Studies on Trainers in Vocational Education and Training: key actors to make lifelong learning a reality in Europe LOT 2) that was commissioned by the European Commission to Research voor Beleid (RvB) & PLATO (2008), this article looks upon the VET trainers’ main characteristics in South-Eastern Europe, from a comparative perspective by examining two elements. The first focuses on the selection procedure and working conditions of VET trainers, and the second focuses on the opportunities for and obstacles to their professional development and evaluation.

*Vocational education and training provision
in South-Eastern Europe: main trends*

VET initiatives – both initial and continuing – in South-Eastern Europe (with minor variations from one country to another) are organized and carried out by different authorities and institutions, primarily ministries (largely of education and/or labour), public agencies, some universities, NGOs, adult vocational centres, trade unions, advisory organizations, chambers and private vocational and industry centres, as well as a number of funded projects. The majority of these projects are funded by the EU whereas a small fraction is subsidized by different states as a form of public investment (Zarifis 2009: 164-165). Many studies – such as the study on “VET trainers in public and private training institutions” (RvB & PLATO, 2008) and the EUROTRAINER study that focuses on the situation and qualification of trainers in Europe (Kirpal & Tutschner, 2008) – present clear evidence that the converging element for implementing lifelong learning in South-Eastern Europe is largely related to VET trainers with the aim of improving their employability (European Commission, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2003d). This development has been largely supported by special policies literally creating a maze of activities, especially in Turkey, where the proportion of actions and projects taking place are more varied in character than the rest of countries mentioned here, and involve far more elaborate networking among different players. However, lack of previous experience in the area of VET, along with the constant pressure for absorbing available EU funds (this is more obvious in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey, and less so in Bulgaria that has stronger historical ties with the development of VET during the communist period), has largely forced the development of incomplete policies that occasionally serve the means of the funding procedure without delivering a high quality end-product (Zarifis, 2009: 165).

In Bulgaria VET is organized and carried out by diverse authorities and institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLSP), the National Agency for Vocational Training and Education (NAVET) and the Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC). In terms of policies developed in this area, two main Acts regulate the vocational education and training system in Bulgaria. The Vocational Education and Training Act (VETA), adopted in 1999, regulates the organization, management and funding of the vocational education and training system. It covers initial vocational education and training and continuing vocational training, where it is complemented by the Employment Promotion Act (EPA) which replaced the Unemployment Protection and Employment Incentives Act (UPEIA) that was adopted in 1997. It is the primary act dealing with continuing vocational training (especially for the unemployed). VETA provides for the establishment of close links between vocational education and training, the social partners and the labour market, for institutional decentralization of the vocational education and training system to regional,

municipal and school levels, and for ensuring quality within the training process. In this context NAVET, which is the primary body established under VETA, provides for the training (initial and continuing) and evaluation of the professional competencies. In terms of links between formal education and vocational practice, initial vocational education and training in Bulgaria is primarily school-based. VETA provides for the relation between initial and continuing vocational education. Initial vocational education and training are a necessary prerequisite for further vocational training and personal development, from the perspective of the new requirements for mobility, adaptability, professional knowledge and culture and entrepreneurial skills. In terms of funding, the activities for improvement of the qualification and re-qualification are financed almost exclusively by the “Central Fund for Vocational Qualification and Re-Qualification”. Subsequently this fund has been renamed “Vocational Qualification and Re-Qualification of the Unemployed” (VQRU) and distributed by the National Labour Exchange. The learners’ educational expenses (qualification or re-qualification) are paid by the state through the VQRU fund, through the labour market, through co-operative funds or by sponsoring organizations.

In Cyprus the dominant actors responsible for governing and promoting VET and implementing the relevant policy are the Planning Bureau (PB), the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (MLSI) and most importantly the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA). MoEC has the overall responsibility for the enforcement of education laws, the implementation of education policy and the administration of education. It manages and operates public education institutions for the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels including both general and technical-vocational education. MoEC is also responsible for managing the various levels of public education. Other ministries are active in the provision of education and training. The MLSI, as part of its responsibility to cater for labour and human resource development matters, has taken initiatives to set up professionally oriented education and training institutions. HRDA is a semi-government organization whose mission is to create the necessary prerequisites for the planned and systematic training and development of human resources of Cyprus. As from 2003, HRDA’s powers were broadened and more precise responsibilities were assigned with respect to standards for vocational qualifications, vocational guidance, and cross-border activities, as well as the accreditation of VET centres and VET trainers that is to be implemented from the beginning of 2013. In terms of VET funding, it must be noted that there is still no completely developed funding mechanism to increase private investment from enterprises, households and individuals. There is, however, provision in the law for subsidies of the workers’ training. HRDA encourages a mix of public and private sector donors. This funding takes the form of a training tax of 0.5 per cent of the wages of salary earners and a reduced fee is charged for some courses. HRDA’s policy and schemes for funding non-

formal learning provide added motivation to engage private investment by following a policy of co-financing training activities and projects initiated by enterprises and private training institutions. This policy has contributed to rapid increase of training provision, in terms of number and training facilities (CEDEFOP/HRDA, 2005).

In Greece the competent body appointed to implement the Copenhagen objectives in Greece is the Organization for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK) established in 1992. OEEK is the national reference point for IVET. It is also the supervisor of the public and private Vocational Training Institutes (IEK). Until 1992 the social partners did not play a distinct role in the development of vocational training in Greece. The State was the most important agency for planning and implementing vocational training and education measures. The ambiguity of the role of the social partners changed as of 1998. They became involved in the administrative boards of organizations involved in training and education (National Labour Institute, National Employment Observatory, and National Centre for Vocational Orientation). In parallel, they promoted relevant research and publications, and took initiatives to invest in human resources, bolster proactive measures of intervention in the labour market resulting in the more effective contribution of social partners associations to optimizing vocational training and employment promotion. More recently the Greek Government passed the first bill on Lifelong Learning (Law 3369/2005) that was replaced by an updated one (Law 3879/2010). This is an integrated legislative framework falling under the manpower development strategy and investment on human capital. In this context, a priority to the development and activation of the 'National System for Linking Vocational Education and Training with Employment' (ESSEEKA) has been given. The pillar of such a system is the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS) that was very recently merged with two other organizations into a single entity, the National Organization for Accreditation of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). EOPPEP is expected to develop the means for accreditation of vocational qualifications system such as the introduction of ECVT (European Credits for VET). With the realisation of ESSEEKA and with the promotion of the subject of a single accreditation, the law provides the possibility for social partners to create relevant bodies, aiming, eventually, to active participation and the strengthening of social effectiveness of VET.

In Turkey VET is managed in a way that covers labour market's needs in professional skills and concentrates on secondary school VET provision. It was this among other structural and legislative needs that led to a multi-million project funded by the EU on Strengthening VET (SVET). SVET was a five-year project (2002-2007) resulting from an agreement signed between the European Commission and the Government of Turkey, which had a total budget of € 58.2 million. The project found itself at the centre of a debate about the relationship (actual and desired) between labour and education; of another debate about central, provincial and local responsibilities; and of a third

debate about the likely career path of VET graduates. In terms of policy initiatives and implementation, the structure and function of the VET system in Turkey is defined in two laws; Law 1739/1973 National Education Basic Law, and Law 3308/1986 Apprenticeship and Vocational Training Law. Law 3308 comprises two components covering the entire vocational education system at different levels. The main importance of this law is that it covers not only apprenticeships but also the entire VET system. It also establishes a connection between the education system and the needs of sectors by giving new responsibilities and incentives to enterprises and incorporates the involvement of the social partners in decision-making bodies at different levels. In terms of links with the formal education system, vocational and technical secondary education consists of education institutions that train manpower for a range of occupational and vocational areas and prepare students for higher education. Within the framework of Law 3308/1986, the students at vocational and technical training level have the opportunity to undertake a part of their applied training at business facilities. As a result of arrangements introduced by the Law on Apprenticeship and Vocational Training, the system of vocational training has found three main areas of application:

- formal vocational education (school based);
- apprenticeship training (school and industry based);
- vocational courses (provided by various companies).

Taking into consideration the needs of society, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) shows sustained effort to co-operate with the private sector and a number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in all areas, including curriculum development, generating additional resources, more efficient and effective use of existing human resource capacity, and aligning vocational education and training with realities of workplaces.

From this brief presentation it is evident that in the field of VET there is a wide range of activities involving a variety of actors that respond to the need for quality provision and ultimately for developing qualified trainers. Noticeable trends, however, also include the creation of programmes of educational reform in most of these countries (mainly Bulgaria and Greece); a movement towards a 'parity of esteem' between academic and vocational education (this is particularly noticeable in Greece); the use of various types of accreditation system (that in most cases do not correspond to any given European framework), the emergence or growth of private training institutions in all of these countries; a particular concern about unemployment and moving the long-term unemployed into work and off benefit dependency (especially in Greece, where the unemployment rate is well over 18 per cent due to the socio-economic measures); and the strengthening of attempts to use VET to improve social inclusion and equity (often with a focus on the unequal distribution of opportunities to those from lower socio-economic groups and certain ethnic minority backgrounds).

Based on this primary appreciation of VET provision in South-Eastern Europe, the next section of the paper aims at depicting some strengths and irregularities regarding professionalization of VET trainers. This is done with by using a comparative framework that utilizes two distinct units. The first relates to the selection procedures and working conditions of VET trainers, mainly focusing on recruitment, professional expectations and working conditions. The second relates to offered opportunities and possible career paths, professional development and evaluation of the training staff. Comparison is primarily based on the official country reports submitted to the Commission, specific laws and decrees published in official government gazettes, and information collected from separate VET structures, with direct reference to the findings presented in the study report on “VET trainers in public and private training institutions” (RvB & PLATO, 2008).

Selection procedures and working conditions for VET trainers

The channels through which VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe are recruited are diverse and not at all formalized. More specifically:

In *Bulgaria* training staff (in all VET) is normally selected among academics and people who are specially trained (with a higher education degree). After selection, trainers are generally employed for the whole period for which the programme lasts. The permanent staff consists of the board of directors that are generally academics and researchers. All training staff is contracted depending on their duties, for a period of time that varies from twelve months to three years with contract renewals after that period has been completed and upon their performance and the needs of the centre (HRDC, 2002). Moreover, there are no restrictions (regulatory or other) regarding the pursuit of the occupation by professionals in the industrial sector. Nor are there any restrictions (of normative or other nature) on teaching activity performed by experts from the industrial sector. The Public Education Act (1996) allows vocational training of students to be conducted by persons qualified in the relevant field without a teaching certificate. It is impossible, however, to say whether they are experts from the industrial sector or unemployed professionals who have found employment in education. Nor are there any obstacles to teachers of vocational subjects to discontinue temporarily their teaching and work in industry in order to build on their knowledge and skills in the respective vocational field (Dimitrova, 2007).

In *Cyprus* the situation is slightly different. Normally, most VET training staff employed comprises school teachers with more than three years in service (either in formal school education or elsewhere). The requirements for appointment of secondary school teachers to a training staff position include a university degree in the specialization they are to teach and a Certificate that they have attended the pre-service training course at the Pedagogical In-

stitute of Cyprus (PI). Trainers are selected at the beginning of the year, which means that contracts may not last for more than a year. Before the beginning of each year, however, the tutors sit a special circle of training seminars. All trainers are employed with temporary appointments. The Human Resource Development Agency (HRDA) is currently working towards a scheme for accrediting VET trainers. This scheme is planned to be fully implemented from 2013.

Table 1: Recruitment procedures and working conditions for VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe

	BULGARIA	CYPRUS	GREECE	TURKEY
Training staff selection and recruitment	Academic teaching staff, young graduates with no teaching experience, anyone with a HE degree or a professional expertise.	School teaching staff seconded from the formal education system, HRDA accredited staff (to be implemented from 2013).	Candidate trainers wishing to be appointed in structures providing CVT should be accredited and included in the Registry of CVT Trainers established by EKEPIS. All others need to go through a special seminar	HE degree holders, employees of MoNE specially trained to respond to the demands of the projects in which they are involved.
Employment Situation	Mostly part-time for teaching and administrative staff Voluntary work for a number of teacher training staff in some structures.	Mostly part-time for all staff with one year appointments minimum.	Part-time for teaching and technical support staff, full-time for some administrative staff.	Part-time for teaching and technical support staff, full-time for some administrative staff.

Sources: CEDEFOP/Refernet (2009, 2010a,b), European Commission (2007abcd), EQARF Indicators for Bulgaria (2010) available at: http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/OQARF_Indicators/EQARF_Indicators_Greece.sflb.ashx, EQARF Indicators for Cyprus (2010) available at: http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/EQARF_Indicators/EQARF_Indicators_Cyprus.sflb.ashx, SVET (2006a,b).

VET staff (largely training and counselling) working in Greece must also have at least three years experience in adult education as adult trainers or teachers

(must belong to the EKEPIS registry). This, however, excludes some trained candidates since working experience does not necessarily imply competence. Eligible teachers of adults must have at least a higher education degree in any subject (normally foreign languages and computer science). There are variations in terms of the types of programme in which they are involved (especially applying to CVT trainers who must be accredited by EKEPIS). Still, all adult educators must undergo a period of training in adult education methodology, normally during the summer period, which does not last more than six weeks. This is about to change due to structural changes in the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GSLL), with a new training scheme that is under way. VET training staff is paid by the hour and is hired for a particular programme, after they have attended special training seminars. A new development concerning teachers' and trainers' training in post-secondary VET is the drawing up of a single register of trainers that are employed in VET structures. Upon entering the register training is provided and two types of training programmes are offered; the first addressing trainers without a tertiary education degree, and the other addressing those who, in spite of having a tertiary education degree, lack the didactic and pedagogical experience. As far as CVT is concerned, training is a pre-requisite in order for someone to be accredited. A blended type of distance learning is used while prospective trainers have to be enrolled in the Introductory Adult Trainers' Register. They acquire knowledge and skills related to pedagogy through their active participation. Assessment is based on a combination of participation, essay-writing and planning and presentation of a micro-teaching session (Kokkos, 2006: 374-379).

In *Turkey* VET training staff includes people who work for MoNE. VET trainers in state-run structures must have a degree in the area for which they are employed and the subject they teach. No career or professional development opportunities are reported. As for other providers, such as NGOs and voluntary organizations that offer VET, the situation is even vaguer. Normally, adult educators (both in adult education and VET) are trained and work in VET schools, but some structures (normally those with an orientation to CVT programmes) organize their own programmes to train or retrain the trainers that are involved in their projects (Zarifis, 2009).

The evidence presented above demonstrates that there is no systematized process for recruitment of VET trainers, though some ways of becoming a VET trainer – based on qualifications, professional experience or both – can be identified: by direct contact (in all countries under study), by pro-active search by the provider (applies in Greece where a registry of VET trainers exists, and less so in Bulgaria and Cyprus), and most commonly by job-postings. Similarly, working conditions reflect on a variety of duties in all countries under study that include teaching and training tasks as well as counselling and mentoring and occasionally administrative or technical support duties.

Opportunities for professional development and evaluation of VET trainers

The issue of evaluating and updating skills and knowledge of VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe is acknowledged in relevant policies and legislation in the countries under study as an important factor influencing the quality of all educational and training activities. Up to now, there have been very few attempts to tackle the specific challenges of the education and training of vocational trainers. This issue deserves special attention in view of the importance of trainers' direct and indirect influence in the development of skills in the economy, and also in view of the varied occupational tasks they have to fulfil. More specifically:

In *Bulgaria* over the past decade the number of VET training staff with higher education has been steadily growing, whereas the number of teachers with secondary education has been dropping, which shows some improvement of their qualification requirements. Teachers of vocational subjects who are involved in training, according to the curricula in occupations or occupational specialties, should be experts in the following professional fields: engineers, technologists, economists, agronomists, doctors, professionals in the field of tourism, ecology, healthcare, social activities, public security and safety, etc. The majority of these professionals acquire teaching qualification in the course of their professional activity. All training staff, however, is regularly trained in the Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC) by specialists who are employed for this purpose. Training of trainers for adults is implemented by using different employment programmes. Since a large portion of them are teachers in schools, it is especially important for them to pass training in Andragogy, normally provided by a higher education institution, as well as training for bringing their knowledge in certain subjects up-to-date, in order to respond to concrete employers' needs of modern qualification of their working power-guidelines set in the European requirements for quality of trainers.

In *Cyprus* the dominant player in the development of policies for the evaluation and professional development of VET trainers is the HRDA. There are no set requirements or evaluation criteria for trainers in training institutions or enterprises. Each training institution or enterprise sets these on an individual basis. In case a training institution or an enterprise wishes to submit a proposal for funding a training programme by HRDA, then their trainers need to conform to the HRDA pre-set criteria concerning only their educational background, work experience and teaching experience. HRDA is currently in the course of defining specific evaluation criteria for VET trainers as well as ways towards updating their skills and competences.

In *Greece* it must be noted that although the Ministry of Employment and Social Security has created a trainers' register that was implemented through EKEPIS and now operates under the auspices of EOPPEP of the Ministry

of National Education, there is still a legal gap, since the register prescribes the processes for entering VET (CVT in particular) as a qualified trainer after the completion of a special training course that partly takes place using distance learning methodology (EKEPIS, 2003). Still, it does not suggest the conditions or the criteria according to which the trainers will be monitored or even the possibilities of updating their skills and knowledge. EKEPIS, however, assesses and evaluates the adequacy of trainers in its register based on a combination of participation, essay-writing and planning and presentation of a micro-teaching session.

Table 2: Opportunities for professional development and evaluation of VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe

	BULGARIA	CYPRUS	GREECE	TURKEY
Monitoring of trainers	By an interagency working group coordinated by HRDC, which involves representatives of ministries, agencies, social partners and independent experts in the field of education	The HRDA examines and approves the “Training of Trainers” programmes that are developed by the training institutions and submitted to the HRDA for subsidization, joint Apprenticeship Committees.	From the EKEPIS and accredited VET structure managers (KEKs).	Only through SVET programme as long as it lasts. Relevant structures have their own patterns for monitoring VET trainers.
Assessment & Evaluation of trainers	Not yet fully defined. Higher education institutions, however, do provide relevant courses on Andragogy. In this case their evaluation criteria apply.	Not yet fully defined. HRDA has the responsibility to accredit and therefore assess CVT trainers from 2013.	By EKEPIS. CVT trainers’ assessment when they enter the register is based on a combination of participation, essay-writing and planning and presentation of a micro-teaching session.	Undefined.

Sources: CEDEFOP|Refernet (2009, 2010a,b), European Commission (2007a,b,c,d), EQARF Indicators for Bulgaria (2010) available at: http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/EQARF_Indicators/EQARF_Indicators_Bulgaria.sflb.ashx, EQARF Indicators for Greece (2010) available at: http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/EQARF_Indicators_Greece.sflb.ashx, EQARF Indicators for Cyprus (2010) available at: http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/EQARF_Indicators/EQARF_Indicators_Cyprus.sflb.ashx, SVET (2006a,b).

In *Turkey* within the SVET project trainers' training has completed its piloting phase in provinces and their sub-provinces. In the next phase, the remaining fifty-one provinces will be covered. Through the SVET project, Development Coordinators (former Change Agent Teachers and Curriculum Coordinators) in piloting institutions have received training on student-centred methodology with the aim of focusing classroom activities on the learning process of students rather than the teaching process of teachers. This shift of focus is a radical change in VET institutions, where teachers prior to the SVET project used to spend more than ninety per cent of their time lecturing only. Since the practical classroom application of student-centred methodology requires a change of attitude among the teachers, the relatively short training provided so far is not sufficient. Furthermore SVET does not set – although it suggests the development of – a pattern on which trainers will be assessed. Therefore means of evaluation and assessment of trainers is not reported. According to the European Commission (2007d: 18) the Turkish Government is about to establish an action plan for acquiring “General Qualifications of Teaching Profession” which comprises knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for all teachers (including VET trainers). This will consist of six main qualifications, thirty sub-qualifications and two hundred and thirty-three performance indicators. This mechanism, however, aims at informing all stakeholders, determining cooperation and coordination processes and reflecting qualifications to behaviours (SVET, 2006a; 2006b), and does not provide a system for monitoring trainers' performance or adequacy, nor does it present the means for updating trainers' skills and knowledge.

Based on the above appreciation, the countries under study normally suggest a set of action plan (in terms of prioritizing quality through monitoring and evaluating VET trainers) that is developing or is planned to be developed in the near future (European Commission, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d). In the present decade these countries have realised the need for changes that promote quality in the existing VET systems. Nonetheless they have not yet delivered or implemented those policies – in some countries like Greece and Bulgaria several such policies are already in place – that will provide the means or criteria for assessing VET trainers' adequacy and performance, and will also foster the updating of their skills and competences.

General observations and recommendations for VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe

Based on relevant literature as well as the applicable policies in the countries under study the key problem in VET trainers' professional recognition is largely contained in the paradox that while they are essential to supporting skill development in the workforce, they do not enjoy high status for occupying this role (Leney, 2004: 18-19). The profile of VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe is that of part-time employees at all levels with or without didactic or

pedagogical experience or skills, otherwise highly qualified or with only a vocational expertise, but with low professional esteem caused by top-down developments that are compulsory and prescriptive in most cases and tend to frustrate if not stifle their status as professionals. These people often attract comparatively low salaries while at the same time their opportunities in terms of professional development are diversified in the workplace and their profile gradually grows more varied. Profiles include teachers in schools, instructors and teaching assistants in schools, trainers and tutors in enterprises all dedicated and with other responsibilities. To these may be added guidance professionals. Most of these people also have additional qualifications in terms of work experience or pedagogical training (as is the case in Greece despite certain efforts). Others have specific training in the didactics of adult education and Andragogy (as is the case in Bulgaria). Although they have these qualifications, they are not always formally required or assessed.

Based on the comparative assessment that was presented in the previous sections of this article, the general picture shows certain traditionalism in the sense that the trends towards more active and work-based learning arrangements, often supported by distance learning (as in Greece) or on-the-job coaching (as in Bulgaria and Cyprus), are not very well developed in relation to contemporary views on professional development. Furthermore, the fact that most of these people have such a wide variety of tasks to perform raises the question of whether it is ultimately efficient. A further differentiation of tasks could perhaps lead to a better matching of tasks and talents and hence to greater efficacy (RvB & PLATO, 2008: 113).

In most of the countries studied here, no particular educational or pedagogical qualifications are required to become a VET trainer. The qualities that these people need for their jobs are more negotiable than mandatory. Most providers require their staff to have subject-specific knowledge, and in many cases professional expertise. Occasionally, training staff should also possess general didactical skills. Specific training in adult education is desirable, but it is not always a requirement. Apparently, the emphasis is on working experience and subject knowledge. There is no way one can argue that mere working expertise is not important. A final observation is that there is a significant degree of flexibility in the field, especially in some private organizations. VET trainers employed often hold down a combination of positions. Four particular types of combinations are identified in South-Eastern Europe:

- (1) People working in VET as a main job (with a higher education degree, but without relevant working or didactic or pedagogical experience);
- (2) People working in VET and in formal schooling system (normally seconded to VET structures, but not always with didactic or pedagogical qualifications);

- (3) People working in VET and in formal initial training (offered in schools or other organizations outside the formal education system, normally without didactic or pedagogical experience or qualifications);
- (4) People working in VET as a side job as they are active in another profession.

However, for those whose VET position is their main job, the working conditions, salary and legal position are often relatively poor.

The comparative framework used to support this article provides the general attributes of the current condition in terms of the professionalization for VET trainers in South-Eastern Europe. The four countries have many things in common besides variations in terms of provision, especially if we consider that the policies that have been developed so far prioritise VET, giving way to those who already hold positions in this area to be employed as trainers, or benefiting in most cases full-time school teachers and formal education staff. The question is how policy priorities support the professional status of these people since many of the trainers employed come from the formal school system or have little or no didactic or pedagogical qualifications (this applies for Greece in particular, but it includes even Bulgaria that is the one country that requires a teaching qualification for all training staff, albeit recruitment is always negotiable).

Based on the general observations from the comparative overview and the specific references presented in the RvB & PLATO study report (2008: 116-120) on VET trainers in public and private training institutions, the following recommendations depict a useful framework for developing the professional status of the practitioners working in VET in South-Eastern Europe.

First of all, a discipline that desires to be seen as a high-quality work domain needs proper programmes for initial and continuing professional training and development of the trainers involved. Top-down developments that are compulsory and prescriptive as those in Greece and Cyprus with the application of registries for example, tend to frustrate professionalism. The recommendation is to develop a system which optimally supports professional autonomy and self-regulation combined with accountability, which will essentially “force” trainers to perform optimally between freedom and the constraints of public control.

Concerning recruitment, it is recommended that professional support or training should be made available for VET trainers to introduce them to the field of adult lifelong learning and the methods needed for it. Especially for those countries where most VET trainers enter the profession after a number of years of professional experience this may be a better solution than the solution of integrating teacher education into initial teacher training programmes. Higher educational institutions, such as universities, could contribute to this as well by providing well-trained professionals with theoretical and practical qualifications as part of their initial training (Zarifis, 2009: 179). It is also

highly recommended that professional support or training should introduce the field of adult and lifelong learning and the methods needed for it.

In terms of the conceptualization of professional learning processes, most evidence shows that there is a dominant tendency to think in terms of teaching and schooling rather than in terms of learning, sharing, developing, knowledge management or knowledge productivity. The field will have to organize itself. The establishment of professional associations and networks could help VET trainers in these processes of collective development (Zarifis, 2009: 180). Policymakers at national, international and European level could support and facilitate such initiatives.

A greater differentiation of tasks is also recommended so that people can fill the particular roles at which they excel. Essentially, this means that VET organizations should adopt a policy on the assignment of tasks supported by a related competence management policy. Task allocation policies are needed at the organizational/structural level. Such policies require overviews of the competences of every trainer. The required competences can be matched to each of the collective set of tasks either in determining the division of tasks or by providing additional training.

Professionals perform at a higher level if they understand the dynamics of their work in terms of its content and its methods. That is why for decades the concept of reflectivity has been promoted. The concept implies that through self-evaluation and active research these practitioners will organize their personal and collective professional development and learning. By doing so, they serve the quality of their work, their organizations and their profession. Recommended is that the concept of self-evaluation should be strongly promoted in the VET sector.

Last but not least, people working in VET could organize themselves into professional organizations in order to create their own community of practice and perhaps a collective identity. This can be supported by engaging in cross-organizational, cross-sector or transnational mobility projects. EU funds allow them to participate in international projects and exchanges. Practitioners can take a stand for better employment conditions. They can also create their own centres of expertise, for example, to carry out research or share experiences. They can participate in projects and activities aimed at developing databases allowing for evidence-based work. And finally they can take part in the governance of their own organization, their professional bodies and the political arena.

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КОМПАРАТИВНИ ПРЕГЛЕД СТАТУСА И ГЛАВНИХ
КАРАКТЕРИСТИКА ТРЕНЕРА ЗА СРЕДЊЕ СТРУЧНО ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ
У ЈУГОИСТОЧНОЈ ЕВРОПИ

Анстракт

Овај рад заснован је на истраживању „VET тренери у државним и приватним институцијама за оспособљавање“ (ЕАС/09/06 Студије о тренерима за средње стручно образовање: Кључни актери који доприносе да доживотно учење постане стварност у Европи LOT2), које је за потребе Европске комисије 2008. године спровела агенција Research voor Beleid (RvB) & PLATO. Аутор овог рада – који се бави процесима професионализације VET тренера и инструктора који раде у државним организацијама за оспособљавање у Југоисточној Европи – био је укључен у истраживање као експерт за скуп земаља међу којима су Бугарска, Кипар, Грчка и Турска. У раду се излажу актуелна питања у вези са каријером VET тренера, њиховим улогама и компетенцијама, процесима њихове квалификације и регрутовања, као и различитим политикама и активностима стручног усавршавања ове групе људи из компаративне перспективе. У закључном делу дају се одређене препоруке за побољшање приступа и услова рада, подршку стручном усавршавању и подизању атрактивности ове професије у овом делу Европе.

Кључне речи: средње стручно образовање (VET), европске политике, Југоисточна Европа, особље за обуку, стручно усавршавање.

Георгиос К. Зарифис
СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ОБЗОР СТАТУСА И ГЛАВНЫХ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИК
ТРЕНЕРОВ В ОБЛАСТИ СРЕДНЕГО СПЕЦИАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В
ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ

Резюме

Предлагаемая статья базируется на исследовании „VET тренеры в государственных и частных учреждениях по обучению и подготовке кадров“ (EAC/09/06 Исследование о тренерах в области среднего специального образования: Ключевые субъекты, содействующие тому, чтобы пожизненное обучение стало действительностью в Европе LOT2), которое для нужд Европейской комиссии в 2008 году было проведено агентством Research voor Beleid (RvB) & PLATO. Автор данной работы, занимающийся процессами профессионализации VET тренеров и инструкторов, которые работают в государственных организациях по обучению и подготовке кадров в Юго-Восточной Европе, участвовал в исследовании в качестве эксперта для ряда стран, таких, как Болгария, Кипр, Греция и Турция. В работе излагаются актуальные вопросы в связи с карьерой VET тренеров, их ролями и компетенциями, процессами их квалификации и рекрутирования, а также с разными стратегиями и программами повышения квалификации данной группы специалистов из сравнительной перспективы. В заключительной части даются определенные рекомендации в связи с улучшением подходов и условий труда, а также с поддержкой повышению квалификации и росту престижности этой профессии в данной части Европы.

Ключевые слова: среднее специальное образование (VET), европейские политики, Юго-Восточная Европа, специалисты по обучению, повышение квалификации.