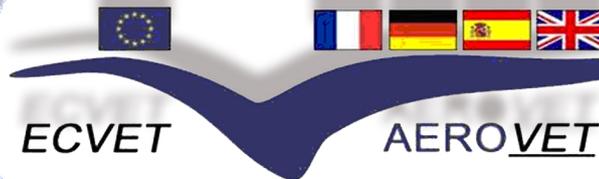


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The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training – ECVET

Case Study on the testing and the developing of a European education policy in Germany

(Public version)

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Abbreviation

Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CFBW	“Communauté Française de Belgique” The French Community of Belgium
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EEA	European Economic Area
EEP	European Education Policies
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance for VET
E&T	Education and Training
ESF	European Social Fund
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
ITB	Institute Technology and Education, University of Bremen
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
LO	learning outcomes
NQF	national qualification framework
OMC	open method of coordination
UEAPME	“union européenne des artisans et de petites et moyennes entreprises” = European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Abstract

This master thesis addresses the issue of the European Education Policies (EEP) through a case study. The policy exposed hereafter is the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training which is supposed to be implemented throughout the EU by 2012. This thesis exposes the context in which this new policy has emerged, the developments of the ECVET policy that might occur in the future and the objectives pursued. It exposes also the point of view of many German stakeholders. Finally, the further 'Europeanisation' of VET whether feared or wished seems inexorable and is strongly linked to the needs of the European Single Market.

Keywords: ECVET, EQF, European Education Policies, Dual System, Mobility programmes, Europeanisation of VET, Germany

Summary

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- 2. European context of the development of the ECVET policy**
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Introduction

The master's thesis hereafter is a case study of the development of a European education policy in the very much specific field of vocational education and training (VET). First of all, I will present and detail the policy related to my internship: the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) policy. Then, I will frame the context of the development of this policy before illustrating it with the German case. Finally, I will put into perspective my observations and analyses through the theoretical concept of the deep forces and the power relationships underpinning European integration in the field of VET.

European ECVET stakeholders have been interviewed for this thesis. For confidentially reasons, they are quoted through their functions.

1. The ECVET policy

a. the Education and Training policy field: an example of OMC-like form of governance

As Paul Margette demonstrates it in his book “Le régime de l’Union Européenne”¹, the EU decision-making logic varies from one field to another and each policy is established following a specific method. Officially, the different policies of the EU differentiated between exclusive, divided and supporting competencies. But Margette asserts that three criteria are more relevant for understanding and categorising them:

1. the degree of involvement of independent institutions compared to national governments,
2. the decision-making rules,
3. and the legal nature of the adopted acts.

From these three criteria, he infers three main paradigms of EU decision-making process:

1. the originally ‘Community method’ which associates the three poles of the institutional triangle, uses majority voting and produces binding laws,
2. the ‘intergovernmental cooperation’ which produces non-binding laws and which gives a lower level of political power to the Commission and to the Parliament than the previous method so that the European governments decide by majority vote,
3. and the recent ‘open method of coordination (OMC)’, introduced by the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000², which falls somewhere in between the previous two in the sense that the European Commission, taken the role of a ‘policy entrepreneur’, can establish recommendations based on the national policies of the Member States and the national governments undertake to reduce the differences between Member States’ policies using

¹ Paul Margette „*Le régime politique de l’Union européenne*,” Paris: Presses de Sciences Po (3rd ed., rev.) 2009, 73-83.

² Presidency Conclusions of the European Council: ‘the Lisbon Summit’, Lisbon, 23 and 24 March 2000, art. 7, last accessed September 10, 2011, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm

the OMC tools such as benchmarking, peer review, monitoring, best practices and policy learning.

In the education field the exclusive competence remains officially with the Member countries. Any act of harmonisation of legal and regulatory provisions of the Member States is excluded from the scope of Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty. According to the principle of subsidiarity, each Member State has full responsibility for the organisation and content of its education and vocational training systems. As there has been no treaty revision concerning the Education and Training (E&T) legal basis, there are consequently no new competences transferred to the European level. Nevertheless, since the Lisbon Summit of 2000, a major shift occurred. “The Lisbon summit gave the go ahead for what later would turn into the OMC in Education and Training. Its individual aspects were constructed in the aftermath of the Lisbon summit in a number of steps which were then sanctified by a series of European Council conclusions. [...] The Commission has gained significantly in influence in this field, even in areas where this was not legitimated.”³ One of them is the Copenhagen Declaration which was approved on 30 November 2002 by ministers responsible for VET in the Member States, candidate countries, ‘EFTA’ & ‘EEA’ countries, the European Social Partners and the European Commission. The Member States agreed that more cooperation in VET was necessary:

“The ministers responsible for vocational education and training and the European Commission have confirmed the necessity to undertake the objectives and priorities for actions set out in this declaration and to participate in the framework for an enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training, including the social partners.”⁴

³ Ralf Drachenberg „*The Open method of coordination in European Education and Training Policy: New forms of integration through soft policy-making*,” Brussels: Institute of European Studies / EUSA Paper 2011, last accessed September 10, 2011, http://euce.org/eusa/2011/papers/111_drachenberg.pdf.

⁴ Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, “*enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training ‘The Copenhagen Declaration’*,” Copenhagen: 29 and 30 November 2002, last accessed September 10, 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125_en.pdf.

The 'Copenhagen Process' lays out the basis for this new cooperation and "heralds in a new era"⁵. It "stresses that it is necessary to strengthen and develop closer European cooperation in vocational education and training". It focuses on the contribution of VET to the challenges identified in the Lisbon strategy. Since then, "European cooperation in VET, [...] based on the Copenhagen process, [...] consists of the development of common European frameworks and tools that enhance the transparency, recognition and quality of competences and qualifications, as well as facilitate the mobility of learners and workers. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) are the main bodies involved in supporting cooperation in VET."⁶ Therefore, the functioning of this peculiar form of governance in VET – the open method of coordination – has been built on these key elements, "requiring the Member States to agree on highly concrete key data (so called benchmarks)"⁷. One of the recent flagship initiatives of the Commission concerning VET is the implementation of European credits within VET, the so-called ECVET policy.

b. The European Credit for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

The development of ECVET began in 2002 after the Copenhagen Process emphasised the need for a credit transfer system for VET in this article:

"The Council of the European Union acknowledges that priority should be given to the following:

- *Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training."*

⁵ Philipp Grollmann, "Professional competence as a benchmark for a European space of vocational education and training," in *Journal of European industrial training* Vol. 32 No 2/3, 2008 p.138.

⁶ See EUROPA Website, last accessed the 10 September 2011, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/vocational_training/index_en.htm.

⁷ Philipp Grollmann, *ibid.*, p. 138

National governments and the European Parliament gave their final approval to legislation through the 'Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training' adopted on June 18 2009.

i. The ECVET Recommendation

This Recommendation was prepared and proposed by the European Commission following an open consultation with the countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, the European social partners, the other European institutions (e.g. the parliamentary committees), the competent European associations, NGOs and networks, the Bologna Follow-Up Group and others. The ECVET consultation was launched at the start of November 2006, to end on 31 March 2007. In analysing in detail the list of the 93 respondents of the Commission's consultation⁸, it is interesting to note that 4 respondents are French institutions, 8 respondents are German institutions whereas 16 are institutions from the United Kingdom, 11 of which being academic ones. These figures could be examined against the fact that the British VET system is seen by experts as the more ECVET compatible in Europe. Is it the reason why they do respond the most to the consultation? Or is it that the United Kingdom's vision of VET has more inspired the European Commission when designing the ECVET Recommendation? One thing appears certain to a representative of the craft sector in Germany, "the experts who wrote the ECVET Recommendation were very deeply into the ECTS Recommendation" that is to say the credit system already implemented in the European universities.

Another important stakeholder on this matter, the SME's lobby UEAPME, as a European Social Partner, was "involved from the start, from the preparatory work on the Recommendation and on the definition of the concepts. [They] have attended every ECVET workshops and committees from the beginning." As a representative of UEAPME explained it, UEAPME "[was] very happy when the ECVET Recommendation was released in 2008. For [them] it was like an achievement. [They

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvt/results_en.html

called for] the leadership on the pilot projects that were to be launched so that they adopt the same line [as UEAPME suggested]”.

Similarly, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts “ha[s] taken part of this consultation process with a very objective and impartial attitude. [They] have played the game fairly and [they] have tested the ECVET tools through [their] pilot project ‘ECVET Reflector’.”

The Recommendation provides for “monitor[ing] and follow[ing] up the action taken, including the results of trials and testing, and, after the assessment and evaluation of this action carried out in cooperation with the Member States, report, by 18 June 2014, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review and adaptation of this Recommendation, involving the updating of the Annexes and guidance material, in cooperation with the Member States”⁹. A little bit earlier, it is also expected that “from 2012 – in accordance with national legislation and practice, and on the basis of trials and testing – it is possible for ECVET to be gradually applied to VET qualifications”¹⁰. To date, the ECVET implementation is only undertaken in the French Community of Belgium from the beginning of this school year as a representative of the CFWB pointed it out during the interview:

“ECVET will be implemented next September within 3 VET programs: Beautician, Auto Mechanic and Auto Technician. [...] Two more qualifications will be also implemented in September 2012: Caterer and Hotel keeper (level 4 of the EQF). This process is carried out on a voluntary basis by one third of the relevant vocational schools of the French Community of Belgium. From September 2012 it will be compulsory for all the schools which offer these qualifications.”

whereas a representative of the craft sector in Germany asserted that “there will be no implementation of ECVET at a [German] national level” since “ECVET is not suitable for [the German] VET system.”

But what is exactly ECVET about? How can it be translated into?

⁹ Cf. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (June 2009), “*Establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)*”

¹⁰ Ibid.

ii. ECVET toolbox and concepts

As for every specific policy field, the ECVET policy is made of new tools, concepts and elements of language. These new concepts are set out in the ECVET Recommendation:

*“The purpose of this Recommendation is to create a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (‘ECVET’) intended to facilitate the **transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes** of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification. This will improve the general understanding of citizens’ learning outcomes and their **transparency, transnational mobility and portability** across and, where appropriate, within Member States in a **borderless lifelong learning area**, and will also improve the **mobility and portability of qualifications** at national level between various sectors of the economy and within the labour market.”*

Some of the terms in bold characters above are defined at the end of the Recommendation in a kind of glossary. For instance, the concept of ‘learning outcomes’ is so defined:

“‘Learning outcomes’ means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;”

It is not dispensable to add such definitions because without ensuring that all stakeholders are talking about the same thing, how could it be possible to achieve recognition of knowledge, skills and competence acquired abroad? Moreover, several terms like ‘transparency’, ‘permeability’ and ‘mobility’ are the key issues of ECVET. As Dr. Saniter from the ITB expressed it, “ECVET provides a lot of useful tools in order to increase mobility, transparency and permeability” within VET in Europe.

ECVET is a system of credit within VET which has been based on the same principle as the ECTS system within HE. It encompasses a weighting system which awards

points to predefined units from every existing VETs in the UE. Thus, this weighting system enables units' portability from one VET to another and it enables also the recognition of units completed abroad in the host institution. On another hand, this weighting system assumes the fact that each national VET system is described in terms of units, which is still not the case for many Member States. That was the main aim of the European Qualification Framework established by a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council in 2008¹¹. In this Recommendation, the Member States were supposed to "relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010". As far as it is shown on the official website of EQF¹², only France, Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom have linked their own National Qualification Framework to the EQF. This is a very important point to have in mind when studying the ECVET development. As a matter of fact, how could the Member States implement and use the ECVET system whereas their own national VET system has not been related yet to the EQF?

ECVET implementation is wished to be proceeded by the "establishment of partnership which aims to provide a general framework of cooperation and networking between the partners, set out in Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) through which a climate of mutual trust is established."¹³

iii. Expected impacts and benchmarks

The 2008 European Recommendation did set the deadline of 2012 for the application of ECVET to VET qualifications at all levels of the European qualifications framework (EQF). Thus, the achievement of this goal is closely linked to the implementation of EQF. But, as it has already been shown, only in four countries on twenty seven it is the case. This is the reason why, two years later, in a communication called "a new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support

¹¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (April 2009), "*on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)*" 2008/C 111/01
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF>.

¹² Official website of the European Qualification Framework, last accessed September 29, 2011.
http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/compare/select_en.htm#comparison.

¹³ Cf. the ECVET Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (June 2009)

the Europe 2020 Strategy”¹⁴, the Commission urged the Member States to re-launch the Copenhagen process. In other words, the Europe 2020 Strategy designed in 2010 in the aftermath of the economic crisis impacted the monitoring of all the European policies including those concerning VET by setting additional and more binding benchmarks that have to be reached on a certain time.

This communication “draws on the four priorities of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training up to 2020 - lifelong learning and mobility, quality and efficiency, equity and active citizenship and innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.”¹⁵

For instance, the Commission explains to the Member States that in order to “contribut[e] to the Europe 2020 headline target of boosting the share of tertiary graduates to 40%, [they have to] genuinely open pathways between VET and HE have to be ensured as well as tertiary VET should be strongly supported.”¹⁶ As a matter of fact, the Commission is referring here to the concept of ‘permeability’ between VET and HE mentioned within the ECVET Recommendation. This so-called ‘permeability’ is supposed to enable the increase in the number of young people entering HE. We can therefore conclude that the European commission is implicitly asking the Member States to implement ECVET system since it is a necessary tool to achieve the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives.

Another headline target of the Europe 2020 Strategy is to “reduc[e] the share of early school leavers to 10% in both general education and VET”¹⁷. One of the methods suggested by the Commission is to “integrat[e] non-formal and informal learning” in VET pathways. Again, this is one of the principles of the ECVET Recommendation:

Art.8: “ECVET is applicable for all learning outcomes which should in principle be achievable through a variety of education and learning paths at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (‘EQF’), and then be

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions (June 2010), “A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy” Brussels, 9.6.2010 COM(2010) 296 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0296:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Idem.

*transferred and recognised. This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, openness to mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners. **It particularly facilitates the development of flexible and individualised pathways and also the recognition of those learning outcomes which are acquired through non-formal and informal learning.***¹⁸

Thus, we can suppose that the Member States which may encounter difficulties to reach the benchmarks of the Europe 2020 Strategy in the field of VET will be strongly urged to implement the ECVET policy and the ECVET tools since it is presented as a 'turnkey' service by the Commission and its agencies. It is actually written in this Communication: "The Community instruments play a crucial role to support both modernisation agenda and mobility in VET."¹⁹

Recently, these benchmarks were strengthened and refined as asked in 2010 the Bruges Communiqué²⁰:

"Taking into account the priorities and overall objectives of the above-mentioned European Strategy and framework, and respecting the principle of subsidiarity, the following is adopted:

- *a global vision for VET in 2020*
- *11 strategic objectives for the period 2011-2020 based on that vision*
- *22 short-term deliverables at national level for the first 4 years (2011-2014), with indication of the support at EU level*
- *general principles underlying the governance and ownership of the Copenhagen Process."*

¹⁸ Cf. the ECVET Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (June 2009)

¹⁹ Communication from the Commission, "A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy", *ibid.*

²⁰ The European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission 2020 meeting in Bruges on 7 December 2010: *The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf.

c. ECVET pilot projects

Consistent with the Copenhagen Process explained above, and as the Council of the European Union invites the Member States and the Commission within the framework of their responsibilities, pilot projects were implemented in order to test and further develop ECVET. A first pool of eleven projects was selected and funded by the European Commission in 2008. They received a grant of 500.000€ each and lasted 2 or 3 years. Each project focused on a specific sector and on specific professions in order to analyze how ECVET could be implemented in this well-defined area:

- **AEROVET** (related to the study of the qualifications in the aeronautics sector in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain with the participation of AIRBUS)
- **Be-TWIN** (the project focused on three sectors: plastic industry, hospitality management and training of trainers in a large consortium of 14 partners from 8 EU countries)
- **CAPE-SV** (related to the technicians and administrative personnel of the performing arts sector in Italy, France, the Czech Republic, Spain and the UK)
- **CREDCHEM** (study of the commonalities in work processes and tasks of operators and laboratory professionals in the chemicals sector in Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Slovakia)
- **ECVET ASSET** (aims to recognise mobility as an integrated part of initial vocational education in the automobile services sector in France, Finland, Romania and Hungary)
- **M.O.T.O** (aims to facilitate the professional and geographical mobility of workers in the tourism and catering sector in Italy, Austria, Iceland and Finland)
- **N.E.T.WORK** (this project operates in the tourism welcoming sector in Italy, France, Slovenia and Portugal)

- **OPIR** (test of ECVET in two distinct professions, namely hairdresser and control engineer (automation); partners countries are the French Community of Belgium, Italy, Romania, France and Spain)
- **RECOMFOR** (cooperation which involved 11 different countries and 51 training centres and which was based on a common job profile « import-export commercial assistant, in France, Belgium, Spain, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland and the Czech Republic)
- **SME MASTER Plus** (focused on the Master craftsperson training in Germany, France, Austria, Norway and Slovenia)
- **VaLOGReg** (focused on two professional qualifications in the fields of electronics in energy and building technology and car mechanics in the context of the so-called “Grande Région”, at the junction of four different countries: Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg)

All these projects aimed to design specific operational tools to facilitate the common definition, delivery, recognition and/or validation of modular training pathways in the countries of the consortium. Enhance the transnational mobility within the VET was also a shared goal of these projects. A broad range of partners have been involved such as public authorities (e.g. the Germany's Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training or the Finnish National Board of Education) universities (e.g. Technische Universität Dresden, Germany) or VET institutions (National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, Romania), public establishments of the state (Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques, Ministère de l'Education nationale, France) and others. France was represented in 8 projects on 11 and Germany in 5 on 11.

Through these programme, one of the key objectives for the Commission was to encourage national stakeholders to work together, following the well-established approach of taking small steps as well as Jean Monnet introduced it to ensure the European integration.

2. European context of the development of the ECVET policy

a. A wide range of vocational education and training (VET) systems in the European Union

VET is highly diversified across Europe in terms of attractiveness, duration, structures, sources of funding, gender distribution and regulatory frameworks. This is one of the arguments of the so-called 'Copenhagen Process' preamble²¹:

“Vocational education and training in the European Union comprise a wide diversity of legislation, education and training structures.”

First of all, depending on the country, percentage of pupils in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational stream varies greatly²² — e.g. from 81.1% of the male pupils in Austria to 18.8% of the female pupils in Hungary in 2009.

Furthermore, we can distinguish many VET organisations such as 'school-based VET', 'work-based VET' or 'apprenticeship schemes' within centralised or decentralised countries. Moreover, VET encompasses initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational training (CVET) — with the latter not being taken into account in this work. According to Dr. Saniter from the “Technik und Bildung Institut” of Bremen, VET systems in Europe could be displayed by a 2 dimensional Matrix: first axis could be the duration of VET — e.g. in the aeronautical sector, VET lasts from 3-3.5 years in Germany to less than 6 months in Spain²³ — while second axis could be the role of the various learning locations (apprenticeship vs. work-based vs. school-based).

Nevertheless, three categories can be distinguished — especially in France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom as it has been shown in the content of the

²¹ Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (2003/C 13/02). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32003G0118%2801%29:EN:HTML>

²² Eurostat figures

²³ All VET in the aeronautical sector in Spain do not last only 6 months, but only some of them since it is not regulated by law like in Germany..

AEROVET European project exposed in the third chapter — dual system, school-based VET systems and modularised VET systems.

i. Predominance of specific type of apprenticeship known as 'dual system' in German-speaking countries

In Europe, the apprenticeship system emerged in the Middle-Ages and appeared in the form of companionship. It was first dedicated to the craft sector. It gradually disappeared with the rise of industry and manufacturing except in some countries in which apprenticeship has been adapted to new industrial occupations. That was the case in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Liechtenstein and the Netherlands²⁴ which have maintained a strong tradition of apprenticeship. It is especially widely practiced in German-speaking countries — Germany, Austria and a part of Switzerland. This specific system of training occurs generally after graduation of school and alternates work-place learning — about 3.5 days per week — and school-based learning — about 1.5 days per week. A German training coordinator from a big European aeronautical firm asserts that this so-called Dual System “is recognised as an outstanding one in Europe”. According to a representative of the craft sector in Germany, “there are 1.5 million apprentices in Germany” — by including 1st, 2nd and 3rd years learners since apprenticeship in Germany lasts 3 to 3.5 years²⁵. It means that within an age cohort about 60% of the young people under 22 choose to complete a vocational education and training degree in Germany. And it used to be more, around 70%. For instance in the craft sector 10% of employees are apprentices and the industry sector has a ratio of 5%. Generally 25 % of German enterprises are currently providing training.

Since the Vocational Education and Training Act (BBiG) promulgated in 1969 and modified in 2005, the German apprenticeship is highly regulated. The Federal Ministry of Education regulates each occupation's training requirements and the ultimate rewarding of completion certification to apprentices. It also provides the framework for the working agreements between apprentices and employers. On the other hand, social partners and the public authorities of the *Länder* work together

²⁴ CEDEFOP *A Bridge to the Future, European policies for vocational education and training 2002-2010*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010, p.40.

²⁵ Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany, *Berufsbildungsbericht 2011*, 2011, 18
http://www.bmbf.de/pub/bbb_2011.pdf.

following some kind of subsidiarity principle in order to determine the content of the school-based part of VET. This cooperation ensures the quality and the legitimacy of the dual system. Wages for apprentices generally are one-third of the standard employment rate in a given occupation. These wages are fixed across companies regionally through collective agreement of participating employers²⁶. As a German training coordinator from a European aeronautical firm illustrated it by asserting that “we produce the best aircraft in the world, so to produce these aircraft, we need the best workers, and then the best vocational education and training”, German industry and business feel responsible and competent for vocational training issues. The viewpoint of German unions is quite the same since apprentices are considered as employees, and therefore possess equivalent social rights. That’s why a representative from the biggest German union explains that “Vocational education and training is currently partly financed by taxes but the main part is financed by companies themselves [...]. It’s the duty of enterprises to carry out vocational education and training. It seems completely normal to everybody when a company invests in a new product and then has to buy some new machinery and equipment. For me it’s exactly the same when talking about qualified workers, companies have to pay for it.” That kind of consideration is widely shared in Germany as well as the principle of regulated occupation (Berufsprinzip) as cornerstone of dual system which is often opposed to the modularisation of vocational education and training²⁷. Apprenticeship can be completed only within the regulated occupations. There are 350 regulated occupations in Germany in various sectors like industry, trade, handcraft, liberal professions, public service, agriculture and maritime navigation. This regulation lays down many aspects of apprenticeship frame such as the duration of apprenticeship, its goals, its content, its organisation and its examination requirements²⁸. It means that the German dual system aims to train for a specific occupation. Therefore those who have completed an apprenticeship are immediately employable. It may be one of the reasons why the German rate of youth

²⁶ CEDEFOP (2007) *Vocational Education and Training in Germany: Short Description*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

²⁷ Sirikit Krone (2010) Aktuelle Problemfelder der Berufsbildung in Deutschland. In *Das Berufsbildungssystem in Deutschland; Aktuelle Entwicklungen und Standpunkte*. (pp 34-35) Wiesbaden: VS VERLAG

²⁸ “Allemagne.” Centre-Inffo, http://www.centre-inffo.fr/Allemagne.html#outil_sommaire_0.

unemployment reaches only 10% whereas in France, it reaches 23% as it has been debated in the third Franco-German seminar about VET held in Paris in 2007²⁹.

ii. European countries with school-based vocational education and training

In most countries of continental Europe, school-based vocational education and training prevails and the State is playing a dominant role. There is a tradition of strong centralisation — especially in France and in Southern European countries but also to some extent in some of the Scandinavian countries. In France “in the field of education, the State has retained responsibility for curricular content, examinations and teaching staff”; [although] “the Government decided to relaunch the apprenticeship system — which differs in many ways from the German one — to achieve a significant increase within five years in the number of young people obtaining a certified vocational qualification through apprenticeship — the Social Cohesion Plan adopted in 2005 set a target of 500 000 young people in apprenticeship by 2009”³⁰ (unmet target to date). There were at that time 800.000 young people completing a ‘vocational education’ inside the school system delivered in a vocational or agricultural high school or a vocational training unit within a general and technical or multi-purpose high school whereas 300.000 young people submitted a contract of employment with a company for an apprenticeship. It means that school-based VET system is the main pathway in France to get a VET diploma.

iii. Modularised VET system in decentralised countries

In Spain or in the United Kingdom, one of the specificity of their VET systems is that they are highly modularised. It means that from one VET provider to another, from one region to another, the content of a VET preparing for one profession is made of a variable number of small learning units which are chosen depending on the supply and demand rules. As Dr. Saniter wrote it in his report about Spain:

²⁹ Bilan 2008 CIEP „La formation professionnelle en mutation : regards croisés franco-allemands,“ 3e rencontre franco-allemande de journalistes en éducation 2 au 4 avril 2008. Paris/Sèvres and Berlin/Genshagen, <http://www.stiftung-genshagen.de/infos/fr/ber/02.04.2008.pdf>.

³⁰ CEDEFOP „Vocational Education and Training in France: short description,“ Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2008, p.17.

„Das spanische Qualifikationssystem hat einen hohen Modularisierungsgrad und ist daher im Prinzip hoch flexibel. [...] Alle Module sind im Katalog der Berufsbildungsmodule (Catálogo Modular de Formación profesional) angeführt. Dieser Katalog beinhaltet mehr als 1.300 Module.“³¹

and about the United Kingdom:

„Ein weiterer Unterschied zu Frankreich liegt im modularisierten britischen System begründet: Es werden nicht nur Qualifikationen, sondern auch die NVQ-Einheiten auf Ebenen des NQR (UK) verortet.“³²

According to Grollmann³³, this feature of the British VET system is consistent with the fact that “Anglo-Saxon models of education lay their main emphasis on rather generic competencies [...] seen as a generic cognitive resource [whereas in other] European countries the concept of a direct relationship between education and the labour market goes in hand with a notion of competence that sees competence as ‘domain-specific’”. It means that another way of categorising European VET systems is the focus which is given to competences and its proximity to the labour market.

In other hands, VET systems which depend on decentralised bodies may induce a great variety of VET providers and VET curricula. As a representative of the French Community of Belgium, reports it: Belgium “is divided in 3 Communities (German-speaker, French-speaker and Dutch-speaker) and in 3 Regions (Wallonie, Flandres, Bruxelles-Capitale). Each Community and each Region have a government and a parliament. It means that each VET provider depends on various administrative bodies. From one VET provider to another, even located in the same street, there is no guaranteed recognition of their VET degree if they are accountable to different public bodies.”

³¹ „The Spanish VET system has a high modularisation degree and is thus basically highly flexible. [...] All the modules are mentioned in the VET modules catalogue which encompass more than 1.300 modules.” in Work Package 3 of the AEROVET Project, *ibid.*, see Appendix I p.12.

³² „A further difference with France is that the British VET System is modularised. It is grounded not only in qualifications but also in the unities of the National Qualification Frame.” in Work Package 3 of the AEROVET Project, *ibid.*, see Appendix I p.11.

³³ Philipp Grollmann, *ibid.*, p. 146.

However, common features among European VET systems do exist and — as Dr. Saniter specified it during an interview — “most of the times [differences are] exaggerated. Each country claims that its own VET system is unique. But those differences are not that big. The biggest difference is related to fragmentation degree of the VET. In one hand you have holistic VET system designed on a professional basis. On the other hand you have modularised VET system. The 2nd main difference is the role of work-based training. For instance in Great Britain, they just begin to rediscover the assets of work-based training. The 3rd main difference is the status of VET learners. In Germany they earn some money but not in France. It’s a big difference. In the UK, it’s a much more liberal modularised VET system whereas in Germany VET is strictly regulated by the law”.

b. The Economic downturn and the alarming rate of youth unemployment

“Since 2007, the European economy is in the midst of the deepest recession since the 1930s. (...) According to the Commission's analysis, unless policies take up the new challenges, potential GDP in the EU could fall to a permanently lower trajectory, due to several factors”³⁴. As declared in the Bruges Communiqué by the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission³⁵, “the crisis has emphasised the need to reform our economies and societies. Europe wants to become smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive. To achieve this we need flexible, high quality education and training systems which respond to the needs of today and tomorrow”.

Workers’ mobility is presented as a key element for a more competitive European economy. It is considered crucial for solving Europe's employment problem.

³⁴ European Commission, (2009), Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses, *European Economy* 7/2009.
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication15887_en.pdf

³⁵ “The Bruges Communiqué”, *ibid.* p.2.

i. Worker's mobility and skills recognition within Europe

On the 22nd June, 2011, the European Commission published a Green Paper about professional mobility within the EU³⁶, arguing that it “is a key element of Europe’s competitiveness”. According to the Commission, “professionals must have their qualifications easily recognised in other Member States” in order to “respond to the challenge of filling high-skill jobs, as the active population declines”. A few times later, Commissioner for Internal Market and Services Michel Barnier made a similar statement in an article for the French Newspaper “Le Monde”³⁷. Professional mobility is promoted as the EU’s key response to the economic downturn.

In a policy paper recently published by the French think tank ‘Foundation Robert Schuman’³⁸, Franck Lirzin explains that the euro area is facing an asymmetrical crisis that highlights one of the EU’s crucial weaknesses such as its inability to react in these kind of crisis because of the lack of mobility of EU’s workers. He argued that the Member States are bound to structural unemployment if they still continue to manage it within their national borders. The hypothetical correlation between the workers’ mobility and the recovery of the economic crisis is clearly asserted in this policy paper. It may be this kind of analyses that leads the European Commission to enhance communications and initiatives on this matter.

ii. Launching of a large number of European initiatives towards youth people

In the Europe of twenty-seven, youth unemployment³⁹ raised from 18.8% in 2005 to 21.1% in 2010 which accounts for 536,000 unemployed young people more within 5

³⁶ European Commission, (2011) *Green paper: Modernising the professional qualifications directive* (COM(2011) 367 final). Brussels.

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/consultations/2011/professional_qualifications_directive_en.htm.

³⁷ Michel Barnier, “Cinq clés pour une gestion européenne de la crise,” *Le Monde*, August 20, 2011. http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/08/20/cinq-cles-pour-une-gestion-europeenne-de-la-crise_1561220_3232.html

³⁸ Franck Lirzin, „Worker Mobility and the Distribution of Innovation: how should the Euro Area be stabilised?“ in *European Issues n° 180*. September 27, 2010. Last accessed 14 September 2011 http://www.robert-schuman.eu/question_europe.php?num=qe-180

³⁹ Youth unemployment includes all the youth (i.e people between the ages of 15 and 24, inclusive) who are unemployed and who are not in school or in training.

years⁴⁰. In certain countries like Spain or the Baltic States, the youth unemployment rate exceeds 35%⁴¹. Launched before the global financial crisis, the European Programme “Youth in Action” has an overall budget of 885 million Euros for the seven years (2007-2013). According to the Council of the European Union and as enshrined in one of their resolutions⁴², it is “one of the instruments contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives for growth and jobs”. The Council links clearly the youth unemployment issue and the economic one, stating that “economic downturns, such as the one which began in 2008, tend to have a significant negative impact on young people and the effects risk being long term.”

Then, in order to tackle youth unemployment, the European Commission launched in 2010 an additional initiative so called “Youth on the Move” as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy. “It is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives on education and employment for young people in Europe”⁴³. Its purpose is to help people between 15 and 24 to study or train abroad in order to increase their employability and access to the labour market⁴⁴. It is one of seven main EU initiatives in its Europe 2020 Strategy to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. It consists of 28 key actions and concrete measures to increase the education and training of youth through mobility and ease the transition of young people from education into the labour market. Youth unemployment has indeed never been so high throughout Europe. The initiative wants to ensure that less students drop out of school and guarantee Europe has more educated people. Specifically, it aims to reduce the share of early school leavers from 15 to 10% and increase those with third-level education from 31 to 40%.

Within this initiative, the European Commission suggested as well to exploit the full potential of EU funding programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF) by arguing that a third of the 10 million ESF beneficiaries supported each year are

⁴⁰ Eurostat figures

⁴¹ idem

⁴² Council Resolution of 27 November 2009, *On a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)* [Official Journal C 311 of 19.12.2009]. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32009G1219\(01\):EN:NOT](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32009G1219(01):EN:NOT)

⁴³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (2010) *Youth on the Move, An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union*, COM(2010) 477 final. http://ec.europa.eu/education/yom/com_en.pdf

⁴⁴ “Policy actions,” last modified May 5, 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/about/policy-actions/index_en.htm.

young people, and about 60 % of the entire ESF budget of 75 billion Euros for 2007-2013 plus national co-financing benefits young people.

iii. What is at stake?

What is at stake is the youth discontent in Europe. The wave of on-going Spanish Protests that started in May 2011, the riots in Greece last summer and in London this summer, the took over of the Arab spring motto “Dégage”, all that events show that European youth discontent is increasing. As many journalists report it all over Europe^{45 46 47}, the unlikely possibility of a European uprising contagion is though taken seriously by authorities and policy experts. A few ingredients of such an uprising are already present: stark inequality of income and high unemployment — in Spain, the youth unemployment rate stands at about 40 per cent. Young people see their future as hopeless with motto such as “Real Democracy Now” or “Time for Outrage” which is the title of Stéphane Hessel’s book.

Another fear, exposed in a Communiqué of the European Parliament, is the brain drain of young educated people.

“Funding for EU mobility and youth programmes such as Lifelong Learning (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig), Marie Curie, Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action, must increase, believes the committee. It wants practical barriers to mobility removed but adds that “this must not lead to a brain drain away from certain parts of the EU”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bernard Ginns „Could debt and inequality fuel uprisings in Europe?“, *Yorkshire Post*, August 9, 2011, last accessed September 8, 2011

http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/business/commentary/bernard_ginns_could_debt_and_inequality_fuel_uprisings_in_europe_1_3659863.

⁴⁶ Elena Herrera „Próxima Estación: Bruselas“, *Público*, July 27, 2011; accessed September 9, 2011 <http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/2011/07/29/les-indignes-a-la-conquete-de-l-europe>.

⁴⁷ Alain Berthot interviewed by Jean-Denis Renard „L’Europe face à la colère de sa jeunesse“, *Sud-Ouest*, August 11, 2011, last accessed September 9, 2011 <http://www.sudouest.fr/2011/08/11/l-europe-face-a-la-co-lere-de-sa-jeunesse-471891-3071.php>.

⁴⁸ “Press release of the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament “Invest more in education and youth mobility, say MEPs“ published April 13, 2011. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20110411IPR17417+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

c. The Bologna Process and the advanced Europeanisation of Higher Education within Europe

According to Dr Philipp Grollmann of Germany's Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), “the commitment to European co-operation in education has increased massively” in recent years compared to times where “the discussion on vocational training used to automatically defer to the subsidiarity principle outlined in the treaties of Rome and Maastricht”⁴⁹ He notices that the European Union is increasingly engaging in the field of education, all the more so as the Bologna Process was such a big success since “in only short time it has been possible to introduce the two-stage Bachelor-Master model in conjunction with a credit points system within the European environment of higher education.”⁵⁰ He adds that “the sub-policies derived from the Lisbon Strategy entail considerably more commitment than previously the case. The “open method of coordination” has been introduced as a very effective tool. This method was tested in the European employment policy, requiring the Member States to agree on highly concrete key data (so called benchmarks)”⁵¹. The Bologna Process’ success and the shift in the speed of implementation of European educational policies can partly explain the origin of the ECVET policy. It seems rather logical to deal with vocational education and training since higher education is already in the process. As Dr. Saniter from the ITB sums up it during our interview “[the European Union] made the Bologna Process and created a European Higher Education Area. So they thought that it should work in the same way for VET.”

d. Skills shortage forecast and demographic change

Europe is an ageing society. “The future European labour market will be simultaneously confronted with an ageing population and shrinking cohorts of young people.”⁵² As a Eurostat statistical survey from 2008 demonstrated it, “the EU27 population is projected to become older with the median age projected to rise from 40.4 years in 2008 to 47.9 years in 2060. The share of people aged 65 years or over

⁴⁹ Philipp Grollmann, *Ibid.*, 138-139.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.139

⁵² “The Bruges Communiqué”, *ibid.* p.2.

in the total population is projected to increase from 17.1% to 30.0% and the number is projected to rise from 84.6 million in 2008 to 151.5 million in 2060. Similarly, the number of people aged 80 years or over is projected to almost triple from 21.8 million in 2008 to 61.4 million in 2060.”⁵³ Further, it is also mentioned that “in 2060, for the EU27 as a whole, the working age population is projected to be smaller by almost 50 million persons compared to 2008”⁵⁴. This threat of skill shortage is taken very seriously by the European institutions because it threatens directly the European economy and thus, the European competitiveness.

But all the European countries are not facing the same demographic problems. In Germany, some economical actors are very pessimistic, such as this German training coordinator: “the job market has changed. [There is] a skills shortage. Demographic forecasts predict that there will be less and less high school graduates, and therefore less and less apprenticeship applicants”. His observation is based on the concrete difficulties faced by his firm concerning the recruitment of their future engineers and technicians. It is a serious matter of concern for this big company. Some institutional actors are guarded about it, as a representative of the craft sector in Germany: “at a regional level, it may occur that a few SCE have difficulties to recruit skilled employees, for instance, in the previous East-German states. But I wouldn’t say that it’s a reality for whole Germany. [...] we don’t suffer for skills shortage in Germany for now.... Not yet”. Dr. Saniter from the ITB argues as well that an “issue in Germany is our lack of students.” A representative from a German trade union gives his point of view on that matter: “in some Länder and for certain profession we do have a lack of skilled workers. For example in Niedersachsen there is no “Industrie Mechaniker” or “Zerspanungsmechaniker” available. They cannot find a single one. So enterprises are looking for young motivated people from other Länder but they have to make a very attractive offer.”

From a macroeconomic point of view, it seems pretty obvious that this demographic background was a strong incentive for establishing new tools that enable more flexibility within VET throughout Europe. This link is clearly visible in the report

⁵³ Konstantinos Giannakouris „Population and social conditions“ in EUROSTAT Statistics in Focus, Vol.72/2008.Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, July 2008.

⁵⁴ idem

published by the armed wing of the European Commission on VET issues, the Cedefop⁵⁵:

“The skills that Europe needs for the future and the ageing workforce that will have to provide them are changing. Concerned that it would be left behind by technological advance, the European Union (EU) launched its Lisbon Strategy in 2000. Convinced by the need to modernise education and training systems, as part of the Lisbon Strategy, the Copenhagen process began in 2002 to strengthen cooperation in vocational education and training (VET)”.

⁵⁵ CEDEFOP *A Bridge to the Future*, ibid p.9

3. The ECVET development in Germany

Among the eleven ECVET pilot projects chosen by the European Commission in 2008, three were managed by German structures (AEROVET, SME Master Plus and CREDCHEM) and five other German structures were partners in three projects (Be-Twin, CREDCHEM, VALOGReg). In one case, a German institution was the project's promoter and a partner in one another (the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)).

a. The AEROVET project

The AEROVET project builds on the outcomes of a previous project so-called AEROnet which looked at qualifications and work tasks in four partner countries in the aeronautic sector. AIRBUS was an important partner of the project. The European pilot project AEROnet (funded by the EU Leonardo-da-Vinci Programme) was conducted in close conjunction with the MOVE PRO EUROPE pilot project which was commissioned by the training coordinator from AIRBUS

"[AIRBUS] carried out a project so called 'Move Pro Europe' which means in German 'Modell Versuch Prozess Orientierung unter Berücksichtigung der europäischen Entwicklung' = 'experimental process-oriented model considering European development'. In this kind of project, a company has to contribute for one part, and a scientific institution has to be part of it. I was in charge of looking for a scientific monitoring. That's how we made this project with the Institut für Technik und Bildung (ITB). And I've managed this project for 4 years."

We can already see that private sector and research are intertwined. In some cases, private sector can provide a boost to start researching in a specific field even before public financial incentive like EU grants is offered.

The aim of AEROVET project was to develop units of learning outcomes based on an inventory of Typical Professional Tasks (TPTs) to cover the profession of aircraft maintenance staff too. Qualifications in the aeronautics sector are characterised by:

- The existence of European standards regarding qualifications of certain professions in this industry (namely regarding maintenance);
- The fact that aeronautic products for a single airplane are produced in different countries across Europe and have to meet the same quality criteria;
- Constant changes of work processes and materials used.

As this training coordinator expressed it during the interview, this high-tech professional sector requires the establishment of a common language and strong transnational cooperation in order to ensure the quality of the final product.

The project outcomes have been tested during three-month transnational exchanges of trainees within AIRBUS. Whilst exchanges currently exist, the learning outcomes of participating students have been recognised as part of the AEROVET project. Given that some qualifications are awarded by higher education institutions using ECTS, the relationship between ECVET and ECTS have also been explored by analysing the permeability of different programmes.

The AEROVET project specifications:

Project Promoter:

Universität Bremen, Germany

Partners:

- Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, Germany
- Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications, France
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, United Kingdom
- Universitat Rovira i virgili, Spain
- University of Warwick, United Kingdom

Lead organisation:

Rainer BREMER: bremer@uni-bremen.de

Andreas SANITER: asaniter@uni-bremen.de

Website: <http://www.pilot-aero.net/about/>

The main reason why the ITB took part of this project, as Dr. Saniter reported it, was that “[they] wanted to test the European Recommendation about ECVET that’s why [they] applied to the European Commission in order to take part of the ECVET pilot projects. [They] were interested in testing the new concepts held in the ECVET Recommendation like permeability, transparency and mobility.”

b. The debate within Germany about ECVET

The ECVET policy has stirred broad debate in Germany. Analysing the interviews conducted for this thesis, four themes of criticism have emerged.

i. Political and strategic vs. pragmatic and educational handling of the ECVET issue

As often, European policies are considered as over-bureaucratic and far from reality. For instance, an expert involved in a pilot project asserted that “decisions at the European level are taken by technocrats who are paid to implement policies” and he added that he did not think that the European institutions did care to know whether their policies are good or bad. It seems that the way he expected to run his research concerning ECVET has been quite disapproved by the Commission as he reported himself hereafter:

“We were expected to run a pilot project about ECVET. But it seems that we didn’t have the same understanding of this word as the European Commission had. They expected a top-down process. But we did the opposite, a bottom-up study. Actually, we start from the expectations and needs of both the VET learners and teachers. But then, our conclusions didn’t corroborate what the European Commission suggested. Then we realised that we were not expected to run a real study since our conclusions couldn’t be contradictory with the EU Recommendation.”

In other words, this expert confronts the political approach ('top-down') of the Commission with his academic approach based on investigations and hypothesis test ('bottom-up'). As a matter of fact, how could the Commission accept a conclusion that would go against a policy which has been enshrined by the Member States and published in several official texts? Taking this line of reasoning one step further, we could wonder how a policy which is supposed to be implemented throughout Europe could take into account the national specificities of each Member State. According to a representative of the craft sector in Germany, the ECVET Recommendation has to be reviewed since "we will not manage to have a one identical ECVET system in whole Europe". He argued that "there are a lot of various VET systems in Europe, differences within sectors, firms. [He thinks that] part of ECVET tool will be selected and carried out in some countries, or for some professional sectors. For instance, some countries may want to focus on mobility programs, like [Germany]. It depends on a lot of factors. [But in his opinion,] to think that the whole ECVET policy will be implemented identically in whole Europe, in all professional sectors is completely absurd. [He wondered] what should do each Member State about that Recommendation? What do [they] have to change in [their] laws? How can [they] implement ECVET depending on [their] VET system? [According to him,] the problem is that the European Commission wants a one-to-one implementation. They say "We wrote it this way, so we're not going to change anything". It's an unyielding approach, it cannot work that way." This stakeholder points out here a major issue. There is a harmonisation ban in the European Union – Article 149 of the EC Treaty formulates it and Article 150 of prohibits central interference in national systems of vocational education and training. National laws which regulate VET are very different from one country to another. For instance, in Germany, two elements of ECVET – the credit point system and the individual examination – are still illegal. Moreover, the implementation of a national qualification framework – precondition for the ECVET implementation as shown above (see chapter 2.b) – poses many problems. During his interview, a representative from a German trade union even wondered [how a NQF could be implemented] in Germany since the [German] Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Crafts are in charge for the organisation of vocational education and training and since they are not monitored [on a federal level] until now". In other words, the German government which enshrined the ECVET Recommendation may not be the legal authority to implement a NQF in Germany.

This last point should be read in conjunction with the article of Philipp Grossman who brought to light the flaws of the EQF and even the “disenchantment” that he experienced after having taken part of the consultation period specifically because of the lack of relevant educational concepts within the EQF. According to him, too many political compromises have led to a “linear grading concept [which] does not depict the reality of vocational career path and lifelong learning across different areas and domains of learning.”⁵⁶

ii. The positive rated ECVET tools and concepts

In spite of these reservations mentioned above, some of the tools included in the ECVET toolbox have been positively rated by a large majority of German stakeholders.

For instance, a representative from the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts compares the learning outcomes approach to the establishment of a ‘VET Esperanto’:

“ECVET encompasses a lot of elements and concepts. Learning Outcomes is, for us, one of the most interesting elements of the ECVET tool box. With learning outcomes, you can make yourself understood by every single European partner. It’s a big achievement, comparable to the invention of a “European VET Esperanto”. Units are formative elements made up of coherent groups of LO. Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement and Quality Assurance make strong and efficient partnership possible.”

In the same perspective, Dr. Saniter welcomes “the new concepts held in the ECVET Recommendation like permeability, transparency and mobility [since] in Germany, VET contents are not coordinated between work-based training and school-based training. Each one builds its own curricula. So these new concepts were quite interesting to analyze with regard to [his] national context.”

⁵⁶ Philipp Grollmann, *ibid.* p.142.

The most interesting asset of ECVET that a German training coordinator from a European aeronautical firm emphasised during his interview is transparency. According to him, ECVET would enhance transparency between European VET qualifications since “there are huge differences between VET systems and VET qualifications of the 4 European countries in which my firm is implanted. A French Head of Unit have no idea what is a German qualification worth and which competences it encompasses. And in the same time, [we] build aircrafts with the same method, quality and process. So [they] use the same competences but [they] cannot recognise these competences from each other. [He asserts that] ECVET can definitely help [his firm] about that kind of problem. [...] ECVET allows dividing each qualification in learning units. [That is why] it is a much more efficient tool for transparency.”

But in the same time, it seems that there is a broad consensus on the rejection of the credit point system in itself which is the core element of the ECVET policy. All German stakeholders who have been interviewed for this thesis are against allocating points to qualifications and units as it has been clearly requested in the ECVET Recommendation. Even the representative of the European craft sector, acknowledged during her interview that the credit point system “was a mistake”.

iii. Threat perception on the dual system

An German academic expert sees ECVET as a potential threat towards the German high quality VET system. In his point of view, “[ECVET] could lead to more liberalism and more fragmentation within the VET. [He wondered] what would happen if a VET provider offers 3 or 5 learning units instead of a whole qualification. For now, it’s not possible in Germany. [He added that] in Spain, in Andalusia, a VET provider has designed a 6-months aircraft VET program. [According to him] their goal was to send their graduates in Toulouse or Hamburg in order to work for AIRBUS.” What this academic brings up here is the threat of social dumping. The question arises here is the following one: ‘What would happen if Spanish aircraft mechanics were allowed to work as real aircraft mechanics even though they had completed a lower-quality and shortened VET?’ In his opinion, the possibility provided by the ECVET policy to recognise LO as valuable units which could lead to a certification is dangerous since units do not match any occupations. Then it could lead to an unfair competition between people who have benefited from a whole and high quality VET and people who have benefited from partial modules of VET, the latter possibly being less paid than the former.

Dieter Münk – in a chapter called “das Bedrohungsszenario der ‘Europäisierung der Berufsbildung’” (the threat scenario of the ‘Europeanisation of VET’)⁵⁷ – exposes the different underlying matters of controversy. For instance, he reports that some German academics are so sure that the EEP threaten the German dual system that they call for a rescue of it. According to him, these academics even diagnose the loss of the so-called *Berufsprinzip* which would be swept by a neoliberal deregulation:

“Drexel (2005 und 2006) geht sozusagen zur Rettung des dualen Systems noch einen Schritt weiter und diagnostiziert als Folge der europäischen Reformansätze nicht nur der drohenden Verlust der Berufsprinzips und damit das Ende dual organisierter Berufsbildung in Deutschland, sondern sogar einen umfassenden

⁵⁷ Dieter Münk „Fest gemauert in der Erden? Der europäische Integrationsprozess und die berufliche Bildung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,“ in *Das Berufsbildungssystem in Deutschland; Aktuelle Entwicklungen und Standpunkte*, ed. VS VERLAG (2010), p.189-219.

Prozess ökonomischer Deregulierung, der verbunden wird mit Prozessen „neoliberaler Reregulierung“ (Drexel 2005).⁵⁸

But he analyses the fact that many German academics look very critically and sceptically at the European policies related to VET from an historical point of view. He recalls that the so-called dual system is closely linked to the social archetype of ‘deutscher Facharbeiter’. He adds that the ratio of craft workers in Germany is higher than in other OECD states and that the dual system has played a major role in the economic competitiveness of German in the last decades.

iv. Do young people undergoing a VET want to move?

Another important issue in Germany about ECVET addresses the apprentices’ mobility. As it has been shown previously (see Chapter 2.B.i), it is a key element emphasised by the Commission. But during the interviews, lots of concerns have been raised on this issue. As a matter of fact, every policies or official documents assume that people who complete a VET are eager to study abroad during their learning pathway. On that assumption, the European Commission – notably through the flagship initiative ‘Youth on the Move’ – urges the Member States to facilitate and reinforce mobility programmes for young people during VET.

And yet, many stakeholders questioned for this thesis wondered whether young people undergoing a VET wanted to move.

For instance, a representative of a German union finds the idea of promoting mobility during apprenticeship “absurd”:

“I don’t think that each apprentice does necessarily want to experience such a program. We have to respect the will of each apprentice. I have nothing against those who say that we have now a European labour market but to say that we must now go as far as we can and become as flexible as we can and therefore work in every single European country, it doesn’t match reality of employment. When an apprentice wants to learn abroad, we have to give him/her this possibility. But the majority of them don’t want to travel around the world. They

⁵⁸ Dieter Münk, *ibid.*, p.191.

don't even want to move from North to South Germany. They want to learn and work in their area, where their family and friends are. I find such idea problematical and for me this European mobility is somehow absurd."

Even the UEAPME which is a strong supporter of the mobility programmes and thank to whom the European Commission proposed benchmarks on VET mobility in its brand new Working Paper concedes that the mobility rate of VET learners is lower than the mobility rate of students. Nonetheless the argument of the lower appetite of VET learners for mobility programmes did not convince them. UEAPME argues that stakeholders "need first to know the causes of such lower mobility rate" before concluding that these programmes are useless. Hereafter is the statement of one of their representatives on that matter:

"The European Commission and the European Council encourage and support very strongly learning mobility between Member States. It's a key element of the ongoing European policies. UEAPME has fought strongly for years to get an "Erasmus for Apprentices". The name of this project has been hardly criticised and the European Commission has been forced to abandon it but the concept has been kept. We want to give VET learners the same opportunity that students have with the Erasmus program. That means that each VET learner should be offered to complete a part of his/her curricula abroad while ensuring validation and recognition of his/her mobility experience in his/her home country That's what we support from the beginning as UEAPME: a transnational mobility for vocational education and training learners."

And she went even further when asserting at the end of the interview that "[her] dream, as UEAPME, is that mobility period becomes compulsory for all VET paths. [She added that] it should become the rule."

Positions on this issue are greatly differing. As Viviane Redding summarised it during a speech in the European Parliament, "we have to **give the will** to young people – and to less young people – to go outside their Member State in order to get the

experience which is important if we want to have a real European education and training area.”⁵⁹

c. Actions of lobbying

As it has been exposed in this chapter, ECVET has provoked a great deal of discussion in Germany. Many points are being criticised such as the credit point system, the mobility programmes and so on. Stakeholders, who have been interviewed for this work, try to exert a pressure on the Commission to tip the scales in their favour.

⁵⁹ Speech by Vice-President of the European Commission Viviane Reding Monday, 6 June 2011 in Strasbourg during a European Parliament debate on the report of the MEP Nadja Hirsch “on European cooperation in vocational education and training to support the Europe 2020 strategy” (2010/2234(INI)), Last updated: 6 September 2011, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20110606+ITEM-026+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

4. Deep forces and power relationships underpinning Europeanisation of vocational education and training

a. The growing role of the European Commission?

Fostering its monitoring of VET policies and in particular in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Commission decided to assess the progress and priorities of cooperation and to review at two-year intervals. In the Communiqué of the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission who met in Bruges on 7 December 2010, the strategic approach and priorities of the Copenhagen process for 2011-2020 has been reviewed (so-called the Bruges Communiqué). In the first paragraph of this Communiqué, the following wording intrigues:

“Europe is trying to recover from a severe economic and financial crisis. Unemployment rates are high – in particular amongst young people. The crisis has emphasised the need to reform our economies and societies. Europe wants to become smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive. To achieve this we need flexible, high quality education and training systems which respond to the needs of today and tomorrow.”⁶⁰

Who is speaking on behalf of ‘Europe’? Who is this ‘we’? The question of the political content of this Communiqué arises since it addresses implicitly the need for education reforms within the Member States. And yet, everything is done to avoid this kind of criticism since it is presented from a ‘common sense’ point of view.

Moreover, the Open Method of Coordination is explicitly mentioned as a tool which should be used in the field of the European policies implementation.

As a matter of fact, through the OMC-like form of governance exposed above (chapter 1.a), the European Commission introduced a modus operandi based on numerical/statistical approach, the so-called benchmarks. According to Roger Dale, these supposedly “objective indicators, typically drawn-up by ‘a-national experts’

⁶⁰ “The Bruges Communiqué“, ibid. p.2.

have led many people [...] to infer that the process was somehow ‘apolitical’ or ‘depoliticised’.”⁶¹ And he goes on to object that “indicators and benchmarks necessarily have ‘political’ consequences [even if] this would be done ‘unconsciously’”⁶². Roger Dale then quotes Jean-Claude Barbier⁶³: “EU policies [...] contribute to the *de-coupling* of the sphere of policies from the sphere of politics. More and more, at the EU level, cognitive and formative frameworks are established, which have an important cognitive influence on the way national programmes and policies are designed”.

Since 2004, the European institution Cedefop has been mandated by the European Commission to report on how countries are progressing towards achieving commonly agreed VET policy goals. It is a kind of ‘armed wing’ of the Commission on VET issues playing a central and yet ambiguous role in the field of EEP. A German training coordinator told of a little event that reflects the relationships between the national officials in charge of the ECVET matter and the Cedefop:

“I ask directly one of the Head of Cedefop during our final report presentation: [Why do we absolutely need to implement points?]. They couldn’t give me a relevant explanation. The only argument was “We need points because it has to be connected with the academic system ECTS and ECTS do have points. But I retort: “ECVET is output oriented and ECTS is input oriented, it cannot work!” And then I received no answer.”

This is a meaningful situation which shows that the Cedefop missions focus on technical issues rather than on substantive issues. Cedefop is not mandated to challenge European policies but to provide technical support to the Member States in the implementation of these policies and to the EC in collecting the statistical data needed to monitor the policies. However, Cedefop presents itself as a European expertise centre which works with academics, representatives of employers and trade unions and practitioners and which provides them with up-to-date information

⁶¹ Roger Dale “Studying Globalisation and Europeanisation in Education: Lisbon, the Open Method of Coordination and beyond.” In *Globalisation & Europeanisation in Education*, edited by Roger Dale & Susan Robertson, UK: Symposium Books, 2009, p.134.

⁶² idem

⁶³ Jean-Claude Barbier (2007) The European Social Model (ESM) and Cultural Diversity in Europe, Inaugural lecture as adjungeret professor, University of Aalborg, 4 March, p.8.

on developments, experience and innovation in VET, and forums for policy debate. Cedefop is also the 'scientifically-backed' argument of the Commission on all matters relating to VET in Europe. Every communiqué or reports of the Commission concerning VET mentioned the statistical results of the Cedefop researches. In other words, it may happen that Cedefop finds itself in a position of judge and jury from time to time since it is in charge of the implementation of the EEP and in the same time, of the academic research in the Education field. We come back then full circle. As we have seen it above, implementing policies is a political action and making research for a political body, in other words the Commission, is a high wire exercise.

b. The economic deep forces

In the Bruges Communiqué mentioned before, we can read this request:

“VET policies alone do not suffice to address socio-economic challenges and make mobility and lifelong learning a reality. Comprehensive approaches are required which link VET to other policies, in particular employment and social policies.”⁶⁴

In other words, it is requested that VET be designed to fit more the job market needs. It seems a priori obvious since people who complete a VET are supposedly trained for a specific occupation. But still, once again, the economic deep forces move forward the European Integration. As a representative of a German union explained it during the interview, “Europe wants to become the most competitive and the most attractive economy in the world. [...] Then it makes sense to broaden national labour markets. But then it creates a European concurrence of the jobholders. But it really works only if a jobholder is really employable in whole Europe.” It means that VET and market goes hand in hand. Since there is a Single Market in the European Union, VET is inevitably impacted. The question here is to know if the trend in VET will go towards whether more liberalisation / modularisation or not. All the elements and arguments gathered during this work are very much contrasted. On one hand, and as a representative of the skilled craft sector in Germany illustrated it for the

⁶⁴ “The Bruges Communiqué”, *ibid.* p.5.

German case, “German skilled craft enterprises need more and more employees with international skills. [...] we do have more and more skilled crafts enterprises (SCE) who access to the European market, especially those located at the borders. Therefore they demand skills in foreign languages. 50,000 out of the 900,000 German SCE have already international business relationships. It’s increasingly important that SCE dispose of employees who speak foreign language, who are used to work in an international environment and who can negotiate in such environment. It’s essential that our VET provide trainees with more international skills.” In other word, it is important for the competitiveness of European enterprises that the education of their workers be more flexible and open to the world.

On the other hand, offering mobility programmes to the Spanish unemployed young people will not fix their unemployment issue. As already shown in the chapter 2.B.i, the economic crisis has a strong effect on current EEP. It can also be seen as a chance to make European VET systems more effective and innovative.

c. The role of European higher education stakeholders about EEP

Besides ECVET and closely linked to it, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) is another tool of the ‘Copenhagen Process’. As the European Commission presents it on its website, EQF encompasses „eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8)“. The European Commission defends its usefulness by asserting that EQF „will enable a much easier comparison between national qualifications and should also mean that people do not have to repeat their learning if they move to another country“⁶⁵. However, in practice, Philipp Grollmann⁶⁶ points out that “when considering a comparison between the vocational career for a tradesman who runs a small business in the crafts industry, and a graduate with a bachelor degree who has been taught the scientific fundamentals of his subject area, it becomes clear that both learning ‘pathways’ and their ‘outcomes’ are very hard to

⁶⁵ Official Website of the European Commission, last accessed September 14, 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm.

⁶⁶ Philipp Grollmann, *ibid.*, p. 141-142

incorporate within a single, ultimately one-dimensional EQF-grid.” In his opinion, EQF could weaken “the logic of meritocracy with its bias on academic achievements [even though its] aim [was the] abandonment of such bias”. He also wonders “who should benefit from such a classification”. When subjected to closer scrutiny, we may infer the assumption that the actor which gains advantage from this classification may be the one whose qualifications are ranked at the top of the EQF-grid, in other words higher education. This assumption is also reflected in the interview of a representative of the European craft sector. She declares that “VET has always been underestimated [compared to HE] although it ensures a better employability than higher education”. She declares further about ECVET that “the certifying bodies have control over [it]. As a matter of fact, the European Commission just launched a new call for ECVET projects and it is clearly specified in the call that only certifying bodies could apply for it.” This element leads us to make another assumption about Grollmann’s question. Certifying bodies act under State control. Apparently the Commission would like to give them more leadership within the ECVET process whereas UEAPME “wanted the leadership”. Does it mean that the Member States’ governments want to take back the leadership over the ECVET process? It is a complex question which would need more investigations to be answered. Nevertheless, VET policies seem, as the other EEP, to be a key issue for various stakeholders, whether they belong to HE, governments or private sector.

d. Quality Assurance in VET

As Roger Dale and his fellow academics exposed it in their book *Globalisation & Europeanisation in Education*, “European Education Policy [...] is framed by not just the Open Method of Coordination, and the relevant Directorates General – Education, pre-eminently, but also Employment, Social Inclusion and Research – but by existing Member States policies and preferences – and, in addition, [...] existing conceptions of the nature and capacity of ‘education’”⁶⁷. It means that education, including obviously VET, is designed in each country according to cultural, historical and economic features or background (see chapter 2.a).

⁶⁷ Roger Dale “Contexts, Constraints and Resources in the Development of European Education Space and European Education Policy.” In *Globalisation & Europeanisation in Education*, edited by Roger Dale & Susan Robertson, UK: Symposium Books, 2009, 32.

The European Commission has taken these legitimate criticisms into account and proposed in 2009 an additional tool: the European Quality Assurance for VET (EQAVET).

“EQAVET, which was adopted by EU Member States in June 2009, is a reference tool for policy-makers based on a four-stage quality cycle that includes goal setting and planning, implementation, evaluation and review. It respects the autonomy of national governments and is a voluntary system to be used by public authorities and other bodies involved in quality assurance.

Member States are encouraged to use the framework, and develop, by mid-2011, a national approach to improving quality assurance systems that involves all relevant stakeholders. This approach should include the establishment of national reference points for quality assurance, as well as active participation in the relevant European-level network.

The European Commission supports Member States in this process, particularly through initiatives that support co-operation and mutual learning, testing and by developing and providing guidance material and other information. The Commission will also ensure follow-up through a report every four years to the European Parliament and the Council.”⁶⁸

Is it an efficient tool? According to a representative of the craft sector in Germany, a quality assurance tool such as EQAVET is absolutely necessary to establish reliable partnerships for the mobility of VET learners. He said that “for instance, if an apprentice is sent abroad, we need some supporting documentation in which the LO supposed to be learnt abroad are clearly mentioned. An assessment is as well to be provided, assessment that both sending and host institutions must recognise. The whole process has to follow quality assurance procedures to prove that standards of quality are being attained.”

⁶⁸ Official website of the European Commission, last accessed September 29, 2011. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1134_en.htm.

But for a representative of a German union, this tool is still a very much theoretical one and he doubts very much of its efficiency:

“We have been told that there is some quality assurance involved [in the EQF and ECVET policies]. We really wonder how they will deal with that. According to Europe, each profession, each vocational diploma has to be linked to a certain level of the EQF and it must be covered by a quality assurance. For that, we need some consistent quality assurance concepts. And then each European country has to establish it.”

e. Mobility issue

An independent study ordered by the European Commission in 2006 showed that⁶⁹:

« Increased mobility can contribute to the Lisbon Agenda in a number of ways:

- By encouraging the movement of individuals from high unemployment areas to areas where there are labour shortages, it can raise employment levels and alleviate pressures on businesses;*
- By enabling employers to access a wider pool of scarce skills and matching skills availability with skills in high demand, it can assist businesses to become more competitive; and*
- By reducing the barriers to the movement of labour, a more flexible and adaptable workforce can be developed, which is responsive to changes in the global economic situation. »*

Moreover, the Commission asserted recently that “Periods of study or training in other countries need to become a normal part of vocational training pathways”⁷⁰.

And yet, during my research I noted that the use of the concept of mobility is an ambiguous one. At a time where the Arab Spring takes thousands of young Tunisians or Libyans at the gates of Europe, the meaning of the word ‘mobility’ could be seen rather differently. Europe history has been fraught with migration streams. Most of the case, it was because of war, famine or persecution. What could differentiate a mobility programme from a migration programme? It is of course that mobility

⁶⁹ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006), *Managing Mobility Matters*, last accessed September 10, 2011. http://www.pwc.ch/user_content/editor/files/publ_tls/pwc_managing_mobility_matters_e.pdf.

⁷⁰ Communication from the Commission “a new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy”, *ibid.* <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0296:FIN:EN:PDF>

programmes are spontaneous and voluntary, not enforced and mandatory. Yet, completing a mobility programme in order to find a job somewhere else, this is the definition of economic migration.

Conclusion

As it has been shown in this thesis, the ECVET system seems at first sight not very much compatible with the German VET system because of its low level of modularisation, because of its high level of regulation by law, because of the many stakeholders involved in the definition and the validation of the curriculum, because of the specificities of the dual system... Actually, many German VET actors from the grassroots do not even understand the need for such a tool since the German dual system is shown as an example for the whole Europe. Nevertheless, the assets for Germany of some parts of the ECVET concept are recognised by academics, stakeholders from the business sector, and actors from the strategic and political level. The institutions who took part in ECVET pilot projects were interested in testing the new concepts held in the ECVET Recommendation like permeability, transparency and mobility. For instance, in Germany, VET contents are not coordinated between work-based training and school-based training. Each one builds its own curricula. So these new concepts could solve some issues encountered by now in the German national context. The future will tell us if ECVET will impulse positive developments in Germany or if it will be restricted to the mobility programs, like in Austria. It will depend on how much the ECVET Recommendation will be modified according of the German wishes.

The theme addressed here is the nature of governance which is emerging concerning European Education matters. Regardless of what each stakeholder thinks, it is a multi-level governance. As Paul Magnette recalls it⁷¹, “the concept of multi-level governance, first developed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks and widely presented as the most able to underline the complexity and the uniqueness of the EU decision-making process, shows the strong entanglement/interpenetration of public and private, national, infra- and supranational spheres within the European policy-making process”. Throughout my interviews, I have had the opportunity to observe that ECVET stakeholders were part of the private sector, were social partners and were academics or national bodies. The ECVET policy arises various

⁷¹ Paul Magnette, *Ibid*, p.82

issues according to the Member State. For instance, the French Community of Belgium do not focus on the mobility aspect of the policy but implements already the credit points whereas in Germany, mobility programmes are emphasised and credit point system rejected.

In his book, Roger Dale⁷² “demonstrates the *sui generis* character of European education as a space and a policy”. He adds that “it is not possible to consider the place of education in isolation from the purposes which it is to serve” that is to say, for instance: economic competitiveness, contribution to the social project, European political/economic/cultural entity building. This entanglement is nonetheless not often presented as such by the Commission although, as I have tried to shown it in this report, these themes would deserve more open debates since it is real political issues.

⁷² Roger Dale Ibid. p.38

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