

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

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**ABSTRACT.** – **The Development of the Romanian VET System.** Vocational Education and Training (VET) has become a major education sector under the coordination of the European Commission. National VET policies are worked out in every country. In this context, the Romanian VET system has undergone a major improvement due to a reform carried out in the post-Copenhagen and Lisbon period. The reform was primarily aimed at the alignment of the Romanian VET system to the European VET policy. The study is aimed at charting out the current state and trends of VET in Romania. While some aspects are discussed, suggestions for improvement are also provided. The research relies on the documents of the European Commission on VET, The Barcelona Declaration 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration 2002, the Helsinki Communiqué 2006, The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008, and finally, on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF), on ECVET, on adult education and continuous education. The study is a synchronic analysis of VET in Romania. It first outlines the system with its components, the laws, institutions, providers and the links between them. The study moves then to a discussion of some aspects which necessitate reconsideration or improvements. The discussion reveals approaches *vis-à-vis* VET which result from international Leonardo da Vinci exchange projects.

**Keywords:** *Vocational Education and Training, providers, curriculum development, evaluation, quality assurance, NQF, ECVET.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, substantial development in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET) has been made, whereby all components of the system have come under thorough scrutiny. Following the European Commission recommendations, national VET policies have been worked out in every country. The Romanian VET system has undergone a major improvement through a reform carried out in the post-Copenhagen and Lisbon period. The reform was primarily aimed at the alignment of the Romanian VET system to the European VET system.

Since 1997, attempts have been made to complete the transition period in the domain of education. The reform was meant to be comprehensive, capable to affect the entire structure of the education system at the level of content, education institutions, financing and regulations. Consequently, the legislation in education for the period 1990-2000 was aimed at the introduction and translation into legal terms of the

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curricular changes, of the evaluation of knowledge and institutions, of the infrastructure and computerization of education, of the domain of financing, of the teaching staff status (statute), of continuous professional training and of lifelong learning education.

The fact that the regulations adopted by the Government (Ordinances and Decisions) and those issued by the Ministry of National Education (Orders) are much more numerous than those passed by Parliament is indicative of the intention of the Ministry of National Education to resort to shortcut strategies for control purposes. Consequently, the legislative framework came to be at the same time both dynamic and loose.

The *Romanian education system* is based on a tuition-free, egalitarian system. Access to free education is guaranteed by Article 32 of the Constitution of Romania. Education is regulated and enforced by the Ministry of Education and Research. Each step has its own form of organization and is subject to different laws and directives. Since the downfall of the communist regime, the Romanian education system has undergone several reforms which have improved the system and aligned it to the European area of education.

The study undertakes to examine the system along with its components and discuss a few aspects which could be improved. The study goes out from a synchronic survey of the Romanian VET system including: the Law of Education, the governmental authorities, institutions and providers. The present status of quality assurance in VET is based on the research of the available materials published or released by ministerial authorities or gathered from EU project reports on European Commission ECVET achievements.

The study surveys succinctly the achievements of the Ministry of Education through its VET National Council for Adult Education, the outcomes of Romanian's involvement in EU projects concerning the establishment of a quality assurance system in VET. Following the findings, the study sets forth some suggestions regarding the implementation of a rigorous quality assurance system and ways of communicating the outcomes to the providers. The suggestions for the improvement of the quality assurance system stem from the research work for a European Leonardo da Vinci partnership project, which is coordinated by the author of the study.

## 2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

The paradigmatic context for the study has been provided by the documents of the European Commission on VET, the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) on quality assurance, ECVET, adult education and continuous education including: The Barcelona Declaration 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration 2002, the Helsinki Communiqué 2006, The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008, and finally, the European Parliament and Council Recommendation on the establishment of a *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework* for VET of 18 June 2009, and Annexes 1 and 2.

Of major importance for any study, including the present one, are the bulletins and works published by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), whose role is to oversee the development of VET Europe-wide, to provide reference materials, information, analyses and reports of training systems, policies, research and best practice case studies. Since its establishment in 1975, the CEDEFOP has successfully directed and monitored VET through several efficient tools and an enthusiastic team of

highly qualified experts. The present efforts of the CEDEFOP are oriented towards reflections on VET reform in the interval 2002-2010, on (1) the achievements of European cooperation and its impact, (2) changes regarding the skills needed on the European labour market, (3) developing and improving skills adapted to a new low-carbon and green economy, (4) the quality in VET systems, on approaches to the improvement of training policies, etc. For the period 2009-2011 CEDEFOP objective is to: inform European VET policies, interpret European trends and challenges for skills, competences and learning, assessing VET's benefits, and raise the profile of VET (Zachilas L., 2011).

Further input came from the Romanian education policy documents: the Law of Education, rules and ordinances issued by the Ministry of Education or other lower level authorities.

### 3. THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Romanian education system is designed in compliance with the following laws, rules and regulations which guide and control it. The education system is governed by the following *types of laws*:

- the Constitution of Romania, passed in 1991;
- the organic law of education (Education Act 84/1995);
- common specialized laws (including: Act 88/1993, regarding the accreditation of higher education institutions and the recognition of university diplomas, the Statute of the Teaching Staff no 128/1997);
- government decisions having the force of Acts of Parliament over an established period;
- orders of the Minister of Education.

The national education system includes public and private education units and institutions, has an open character and assures the transfer from one system to another under the conditions stipulated by law.

In Romania, kindergarten is optional under the age of six. At the age of six, children must enroll for the "preparatory school year", which is mandatory for admission in the first grade. Schooling starts at the age of seven, and is compulsory until the tenth grade (which corresponds with the age of sixteen or seventeen). The school cycle ends with the twelfth grade, when students graduate the baccalaureate. Higher education is aligned to the European Higher Education Area.

The obligation to attend school is established by the Constitution (article 32) and by the Education act. Article 15 of the Education act stipulates that general compulsory education includes *primary education* (grades 1-4) and *lower secondary education* (grades 5-8). Compulsory education begins with the first grade of primary school, where pupils can be enrolled if they turn 7 during the same year. At the parents' or the legal trustees' request, children who turn 6 by the beginning of the respective school year can be enrolled on condition that their psychosomatic development meets the required standards. For children who, for various reasons (social or health problems), have not finished the first four grades of compulsory education by the age of 14, "second chance" forms can be provided. Compulsory education (grades 1-8) normally ends by the age of 15. It ends up with a "capacity examination", which entitles the pupil to continue its studies in the **post-compulsory education system** or to enter active life.

Exceptionally, for those who are more than two years older than the average age of the respective grade, lower secondary education (grades 5-8) can also be organized or made available under the form of *evening classes, part-time education* or *distance education*.

#### **4. THE ROMANIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM**

The objective of VET (vocational education and training for adults) is to provide the necessary knowledge to adults in order to assist them in finding a job or developing their own vocational career paths. To this end, national policies are worked out in every country. The Romanian VET system has undergone a major improvement through a reform carried out in the post-Copenhagen and Lisbon period. The reform was primarily aimed at the alignment of the Romanian VET system to the European VET system.

##### **4. 1. Representative organisations for vocational adult training**

In Romania the organisations which are responsible for VET are:

- *The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity* whose responsibilities are to elaborate policies and programs in the field of vocational training and control the way in which these programs are implemented;

- *The Ministries of various economic and social sectors* which seek to ensure the continuous vocational training of the employees who operate in these sectors;

- *The National Council for Vocational Adult Training*, a council which works under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education, determines the medium and long term needs of vocational adult training and collaborates horizontally with others organisations involved in vocational adult training;

- *The National Agency for Occupational and Vocational Training* is a national public institution whose role is to organise and finance employment-related services. In addition, it also acts as a mediator between employers and the people who need a job and administrates the budget for the payment of unemployment benefits;

- *The Council for Occupational Standards and Certification* is a national organ which elaborates and approves new occupational standards or modifies and cancels the existing ones. Its role is to represent and support Romania's interest regarding the certification of vocational competences at a international level;

- *The Commissions for Authorization of Training Providers* is in charge with the authorization of the training providers whom they provide with counselling and all the in-training they need and also monitors the latter's activity.

##### **4. 2. Adult education providers**

In Romania there are two kinds of training providers: *public providers* and *private providers*. Public sector providers are represented by *schools* subordinated to the Ministry of Education which offer courses to the benefit of enterprises, and *vocational/vocational training centres*, whose role is to train, re-train or offer second chance education opportunities to individuals, especially to the unemployed. Private sector providers are vocational training centres, subordinated to the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, to foundations, associations and economic operators.

Regardless of the form, the providers are all subordinated to the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour and their appropriate councils or commissions.

#### 4. 3. Forms of adult vocational training

The main forms of adult vocational training are: initial, qualification, further education, specialization and re-qualification, where:

- *initial training (basic training)* is aimed at the attainment of a minimum amount of knowledge necessary for the completion of a low-level vocational activity. This form of training leads into a certified qualification;
- *qualification training modules* offer a limited range of vocational competences which enable an individual to undertake and carry out certain activities;
- *further training/education* contributes to the development and consolidation of vocational competences related to the same qualification;
- *specialization courses* seek to develop vocational competences in a restricted field of activity;
- *re-qualification modules* are second chance training opportunities oriented towards the acquisition of job-specific competences.

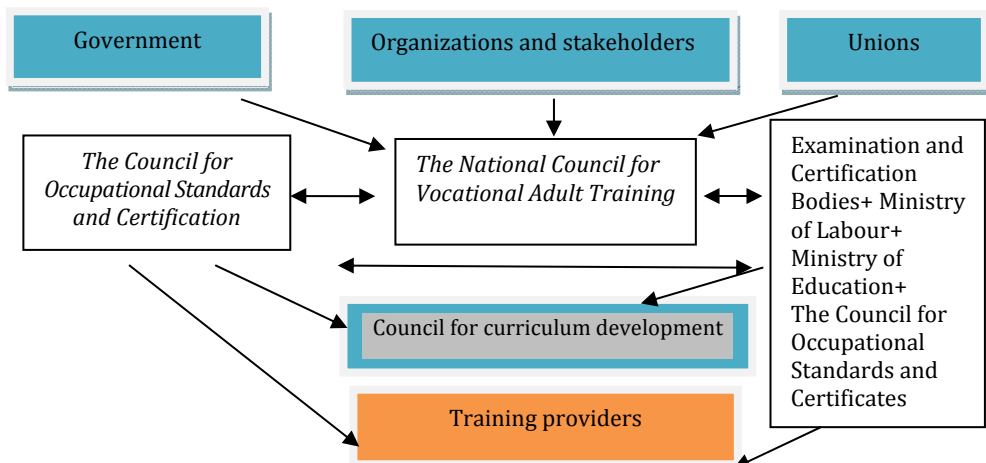


Fig. 1. The curriculum design process (CNFPA Report, 2002:34).

#### 4. 4. Curriculum development for VET and adult education

The development of the curriculum for continuous vocational training is highly regulated and centralised. Thus, most providers use the national standards for vocational training issued by the National Agency for Occupation and Vocational Training.

At present, synergies are put into broad projects which target the design of a curriculum for adult training in alignment with the European international standards. As in most European countries, the curricula are designed after the National Qualifications Framework(NQF), which, in turn, is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

#### **4. 5. The evaluation and accreditation of the knowledge and competences acquired through VET**

In order to enjoy a nation-wide recognition, the acquired vocational knowledge and competences must be formally certified by the Ministry of Education and by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In the case of VET courses, the evaluation of knowledge and competences is carried out both throughout the entire training period and at the end of a module, through a graduation exam which can consist of either 1) a theoretical and practical test or 2) a practical test.

Upon completion of the training module, the graduates pass their final examination and are awarded a qualification or graduation certificate, enabling them to practice the profession they qualified for. These certificates have a nationwide validity and can also be used to acknowledge the qualification for a given profession in the context of international agreements concerning the temporary mobility of work force.

The most common form of evaluation is that aiming at the assessment of knowledge and competences in relation to the taught syllabus. This assessment has a twofold function: on the one hand, it allows the evaluation of the rapport between the outcomes of the vocational training and job requirements, and on the other, it enhances the validation of competences regardless of the way in which these were acquired, i.e. formally, informally or non-formally.

The received vocational competence certificate can, undoubtedly, increase the chances to a career development and at obtaining a job.

#### **4. 6. The connection with the initial vocational training within the education system**

*The representative organisms dealing with this type of training are:* the Ministry of Education, the county school inspectorates, the local committees for the development of social partnership and the National Centre for the Development of Vocational and Technical Education.

Initial vocational training is carried out in accredited public or private institutions, organized by the Ministry of Education or at the initiative of enterprises. The content of the training program is tightly connected to the labour market demands and needs, depending on a broad range of occupations and is achieved through the following forms of initial training:

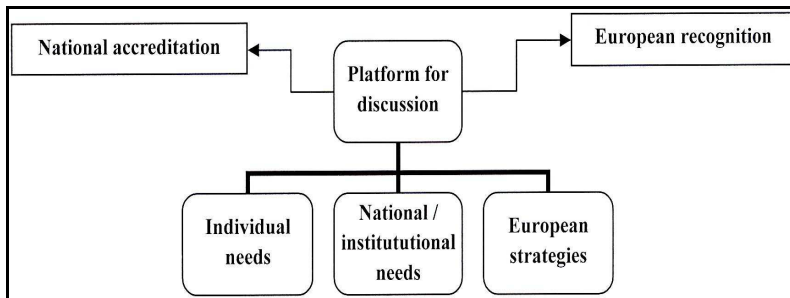
- *apprenticeship schools*, where admission requirements consist of: completion of basic, compulsory education, with or without a certificate;
- *vocational schools*, where admission requirements include: completion of basic, compulsory education, with a certificate;
- *technological and vocational high schools*, which is both a general and vocational type of training, facilitating access to the labour market as well as to higher level studies;
- *post-high schools* for which the requirement is the completion of high school training.

The national curriculum for the initial VET modules comprises curriculum frameworks, syllabuses and the teaching material, all contributing to the achievement of the established training objectives.

The evaluation and accreditation of the knowledge and competences acquired through initial vocational training is consists of *graduation exams* in vocational education organized and coordinated by the National Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation, which is set up every year and functions under the Ministry of Education. Examination commissions are appointed at the level of each education unit.

The Council for Occupational Standards and Accreditation (COSA) plays an important role in devising a new system of evaluation and accreditation for vocational competences based on occupational standards. The new system takes into account the evaluation and accreditation of competences regardless of the way in which these were acquired throughout the formal VET system, independently or at work.

The participation in the new system of evaluation and accreditation is voluntary and the certificates released under the COSA authority are additional to the diplomas awarded by the education units.



**Fig. 2.** The Romanian accreditation process.

The accreditation of various training modules has been conducted in parallel with the international recognition thereof. The Centre for Tourism Training has participated in three Leonardo da Vinci projects which sought to ensure the recognition of certificates in partner countries.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The current education-related topics on the EU agenda, following from the Copenhagen Process and the Bruges Communiqué, are focused on increasing student mobility, promoting social cohesion and active citizenship, building the European Credit Transfer System for VET (ECVET), utilizing the European Qualification Frameworks (EQF) and developing European approaches towards quality assurance.

On international level, a system has been created which allows the identification of education levels for all forms of learning available in a system. This system is called the *International Standard Classification for Education*. The forms of education provided for different levels inherent to the Romanian system of education are represented in the chart below.

ISCED	Level		Form
0	Pre-primary		Pre school
1	Basic education	<b>Primary education</b>	Primary schools
2	Lower secondary	<b>General education</b> which leads to continuation of education	Comprehensive schools: gymnasium
		2.A <b>Pre-vocational education</b> which introduces the learners to work	
		2.B. Pre-vocational education which prepares learners for technical and professional education	
		2.C Professional education which develops practical knowledge and competences	
3	Upper secondary	3.A <b>general education</b> which introduces the learners to work	High-school
		3.B Pre-professional education which prepares learners for work for technical and professional education	Technological high school
		<b>Professional education</b> which develops practical knowledge and competences	Vocational institutions
4	Post secondary education	4.General education programmes /pre-technical education professional for ISCED5	(Special vocational institutions)
		4.B Education for labour market	Post-high school
5.	First level of tertiary education	Bachelor's degrees	Universities
		Bachelor's degrees	Colleges
6	Second stage tertiary education	Doctoral degrees	Colleges

ISCED = ISCED classification

**Fig. 3.** The Romanian education system.

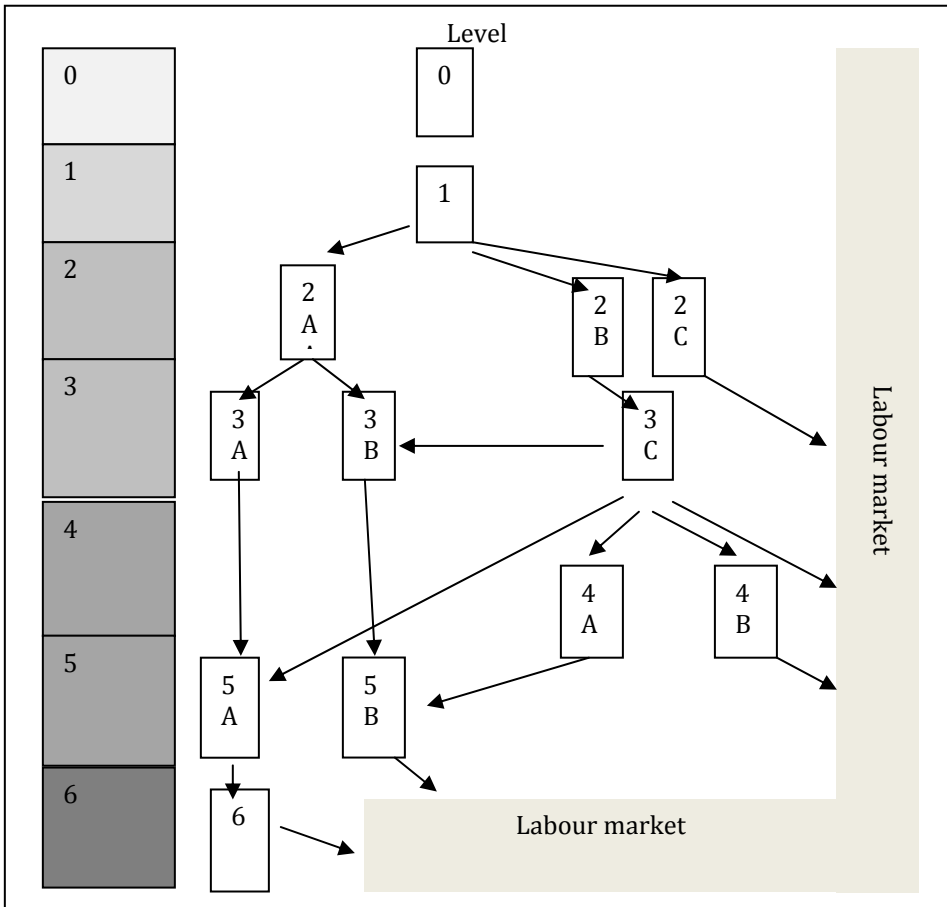
The general interest for VET in Romania is still very low, as most of the basic education leavers choose higher education instead of a vocational form of training. This is a pattern which has deep roots in the Romanian education system. In other European countries such as Finland, the number of students with a vocational qualification has increased in 2008 to 42% of the youngsters who completed their compulsory basic education and is increasing. In Finland the demand for VET cannot be satisfied. Hopefully, in the near future, following a sustainable education policy, the odds will change in Romania in favour of VET as well.

It should be, however, noted that although the levels permit access from one level to another, there is little flexibility for vertical and horizontal mobility between the vocational levels and vocational and HE. For example, a graduate from basic education or a baccalaureate holder is unlikely to move on to level 5 of a bachelor degree, partly because this career path is not very much opted for. This is the result of a particular



career pattern used for several decades by school leavers, a path which goes from basic education straight on to a form of VET and then on to the labour market. In addition, learners are not accurately informed about their options and vocational career paths which may lead to college or university degrees.

The transition from one level or from to another is represented below.



**Fig. 4.** The transition from one level to another (CNFPA Report, 2002:38).

Besides, VET career routes are not very much promoted and made attractive to the learners. The lack of attractiveness also accounts for the low number of students who opt for a vocational qualification. In countries like Finland VET has become very friendly and attractive through international mobility opportunities, 30% of which were undertaken under the Leonardo da Vinci programme frame and were awarded mobility certificates.

Another way to make the VET area more attractive is through offering more on-the-job training as a result of a closer and more efficient collaboration between VET providers and the economic environment. Thus, the connection to companies is an area that is similar in VET in all countries and the problem seems to be how to interest and engage companies in VET training in cooperation with training providers or schools. There are many best practice examples from countries like Ireland and UK but Europe-wide other countries are also engaged in the process of bringing companies in their region closer to VET schools. Although the Romanian VET system relies heavily on this collaboration, the enterprises are very often reluctant to offer placements for the students. In addition, placement enterprises must also appoint a placement coach to mentor and monitor the student's progress. In this respect, there are many best practice examples in Romania, but, in general, as mentioned above, enterprises sometimes resist to the collaboration with schools.

VET cannot be attractive unless it is innovative. Equally, it cannot meet the skill demands if it does not seek to permanently innovate the process. It follows then that training providers should necessarily develop innovative programs and teaching and learning strategies both to attract more business and to make teaching a friendlier place for students.

One of the reasons why VET is underrated in Romania might be that little is done in the direction of qualification foresight or anticipation. In Romania training providers are too much concerned with training and hence are tempted to ignore foresight analyses, while other institutions or authorities involved in the process are less eager to carry out research in the field. Any healthy education system should be able to anticipate the future skills which will be needed by the labour market. In this respect, the present efforts of the CEDEFOP in the context of world recession are aimed towards changes regarding the skills needed on the European labour market, on developing and improving skills adapted to a new, more demanding, economy.

*Teacher training* is extremely important as trainers are key actors in achieving high quality learning outcomes. Teachers enjoy a twofold status: both as professionals and stakeholders. CEDEFOP under the auspices of the EC undertook to develop the: CEDEFOP's network on training the trainers. The network brings together 22 countries and 3 thematic groups focused on: leadership, mentoring, in-company trainers. Amongst the topics addressed are: (1) professional development of T&T: initial, CPD, induction; (2) changing roles and competences; (3) leadership; (4) T&T and learning outcomes; (5) T&T and quality.

CEDEFOP has worked out and published some studies which are instrumental for trainers who wish or need to update or develop their expertise. They include:

- *Competence framework for VET professionals. Handbook for practitioners*, 2009;
- *Professional development opportunity for in-company trainers – a compilation of good practices*, CEDEFOP 2010;
- *Learning while working*, CEDEFOP 2011;
- *Updating vocational skills of VET teachers*, CEDEFOP, 2011.

These materials are available online and accessible to all trainers who are interested in the developing their expertise. The opportunities for development are provided by the Leonardo da Vinci programmes, which trainers also have access to. The question that arises is to what extent are these efforts of the CEDEFOP known by vocational trainers in Romania and capitalised. A further question that arises is how are the *train*

*the trainers* opportunities promoted in Romania. The answer to these questions goes without saying. The opportunities are little known by the trainers or the training providers, who do little to make these opportunities accessible and used by their staff.

The present global recession, the economic and labour market pressures affect the Romanian VET providers in several ways: (1) decreased interest in education and fewer young people capable of paying for their professional qualification, (2) less interest on the behalf of organisations to support further training of their staff, (3) work opportunities for young people dropped resulting from a decline in the rate of employment growth, (4) reductions in apprenticeships and traineeships following falls in investment by firms in education and training, (5) major job losses in industries and occupations triggering fluctuations in the labour market. All these recessionist effects threaten the revenue of providers who are highly focussed on a rather market-based, fee-for-service delivery.

Improving the *quality of VET* is another priority of the European countries committed to implement the Copenhagen process, which could be achieved through developing evaluation mechanisms, through improving initial and continuing training. If, in general, countries and different social partners or public partners assess the process positively, in terms of real achievements, such as: acting upon common principles and national priorities and developing common European instruments or principles, in what the outcomes of the process are concerned, some countries view them differently. In spite of the general consensus that significant progress has been made in the direction of changing national VET systems and lifelong learning policies, some still regard the outcomes as moderate, since they have not changed the national policies significantly. The optimists, however, would agree that more time is needed for such major changes to take effect. A *Briefing note of the CEDEFOP (December 2010)* admits that 'there are also encouraging signs. Despite the economic crisis, all of the benchmarks show improvement in 2009 compared to 2000.

*Quality assurance* has been devised by the EC through documents and tools like: the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) on quality assurance, EC/VET etc reflected in: The Barcelona Declaration 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration 2002, the Helsinki Communiqué 2006, The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008, and finally, the European Parliament and Council Recommendation on the establishment of a *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework* for VET of 18 June 2009, and Annexes 1 and 2. Although in many European countries the role of Ministries or National Boards is to set objectives for VET provisions and its quality and to ensure that these objectives are achieved, the Romanian providers know again little about their obligation to observe and conduct quality assurance policies. So far, quality assurance for VET is a recommendation, which in real terms cannot or is not fully achieved. The providers which implement and control quality assurance policies are the ones which are involved in national or European projects, while the other providers are not concerned with such measures. The Ministry of Education through its boards and councils recommend, though, measures and develop tools to support the system for assuring quality standards, but each provider can then decide on how to implement the recommendations in practice. The European Quality Assurance Framework is at the availability of all providers who visit the EC or the CEDEFOP sites, but is not expressly released and transmitted to providers, who most of the time have to discover themselves what norms they need to follow.

The adoption of National Qualification Frameworks has become another major objective of the EC. The CEDEFOP has, in general, concluded that the Copenhagen process has been a success because of several factors. First, several countries have voluntarily agreed to cooperate and act on the Copenhagen directive towards developing common European instruments. Alongside working on developing common instruments, an increased number of countries have developed and introduced *National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)* which reflect national traditions and structures. Some countries see the NQFs as means to develop the link to the EQF. However, the role of NQFs is instrumental for the adoption of the learning outcomes-oriented approach, towards working out more comprehensive NQFs capable of encompassing all levels of qualifications, whereby NQFs appear as valuable communication and transparency tools.

In Romania and Bulgaria, two countries with somewhat similar experience and traditions in the direction of NQFs, in spite of the progress made, the NQFs are not yet formally recognized by the Council and European Commission, since there is no harmonization of the VET policies and the higher education institutions in respect of drawing up a NQF. However, the process is under way and it is hoped that it will soon be finalized.

According to Zachilas L.(2011: 15) it has been noted that Europe-wide ‘more and more countries use *learning outcomes* for qualifications frameworks, standards, curricula and assessment’, but that in spite of the broad agreement concerning the transparency and accountability provided by the learning outcomes approach, there are, however, some challenges ahead. The challenges have to do with some countries lacking commitment to apply the LO approach or applying it in a non-coherent way and some sectors, particularly general education, are lagging behind’.

The role of the EQF is further made visible in the *recognition* of skills and competences, or rather of learning outcomes, which is a permanent demand of learners, particularly of those working on the European labour market where professionals and skilled workers move or migrate freely. In this respect, the EQF can facilitate recognition by:

- ‘strengthening transparency of qualifications;
- enhancing cooperation and mutual trust;
- establishing a common reference point for qualifications’ (Zachilas L, 2011).

Another step in the achievement of the Lisbon strategy is the ECVET, the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Its aim is to ‘give people greater control over their individual learning experiences and make it more attractive to move between different countries and different learning environments’ (*Finland in Focus*, 2011). This project is expected to be launched in 2012, when all qualification will be translated using ECVET. Romania cannot yet be defined as ECVET friendly, since little is known about this form of validation, recognition and accumulation of work-related skills and knowledge in transferable credits. For the Romanian VET system, ECVET remains a challenge which means changes in the overall rules of Romanian VET, proposals for the implementation of ECVET (information and training to training providers and qualification boards), how to define the scope of VET credits etc., real implementation of the system, control and feedback. Since ECVET is an entirely new and challenging trend, first, to set up the proper context for the process is a challenge.

In this section we attempted to look at the trends in European VET and at the achievements of the Romanian VET system. The number of trends previewed reflect a complex and extremely dynamic European education environment, carefully designed,

outlined and monitored by the European Commission through its tools. Romania is part of the EU and conforms to the recommendations made by the EC even if the pace of the implementation of the trends is rather slow.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study sought to show the present state and trends in the Romanian VET system. It went out from the preview of the documents of the European Commission on VET which outline the current and future trends in European education: The Barcelona Declaration 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration 2002, the Helsinki Communiqué 2006, The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008, and finally, on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF), on ECVET, on adult education and continuous education.

The study first outlined the system with its components, the laws, institutions, providers and the links between them. The study approached some major aspects of the EC VET policy and showed the position held by the Romanian VET. The aspects surveyed and the conclusions were:

- the Romanian VET system is aligned to the European policies in many respects, but it lacks flexibility concerning the vertical and horizontal movement of learners between levels of education;

- VET is not an attractive option for youngsters and the traditional career routes still attract most of the high school leavers. The Romanian VET system does not attract a substantial mass of youngsters as compared to other European countries;

- in order to respond to the challenges of the economic environment and the labour market vocational education must permanently adopt innovative training methods, forms of evaluation etc;

- teacher training should become a priority, since trainers are both professionals and stakeholders;

- quality in VET and quality assurance are key aspects in VET which must be diligently pursued;

- the NQF (National Qualification Framework) is under way, but the Romanian trainers and training providers know little about it;

- outcomes-oriented learning is also a key concept used in all educational policy documents and the Romanian VET is aligned with this principle, since the NQF operates as the National Qualification Standards, but, again, little is known about the experiences and achievements thereof;

- ECVET (European Credit System for VET) has become part of the educational policy but, although, ECVET becomes a reality in many countries, in Romania no education authority promotes and implements the EC tool.

In conclusion, Romania has progressed a lot in the direction of the Copenhagen strategies and the Lisbon guidelines. Although the system was in line with other European systems since the 1990s, the government has reformed the entire system along with its components: institutions, the Law of Education, providers and the relationships between them. It has encouraged the development of a rigorous VET system by supporting the providers and their accreditation. It has steered education in the direction of observing the National Qualifications Framework or standards and developing such forms of

education as: adult education, continuing education, second chance education, etc. Romania participates actively in European VET projects under the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci programme through which an impressive number of trainers, learners and leaders have been trained annually. In spite of these efforts, the Romanian VET still has to continue and accelerate the pace of its reform, involve more actors, stakeholders and institutions and make all policies, tools and paths more visible to the users.

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