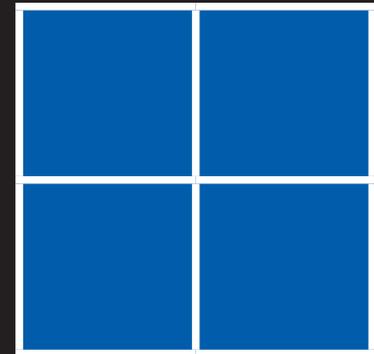


# Vocational Education and Training in Eastern Europe: Transition and Influence

John West

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# **Vocational Education and Training in Eastern Europe: Transition and Influence**

**John West**

**Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES)  
Institute of Education, University of London**

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## **Abstract**

*A number of the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe joined the European Union in the mid 2000s, some fifteen years after the collapse of their socialist regimes. A further set of countries in the Western Balkans are moving towards EU membership. This paper examines the changes in their VET systems during this period of change.*

*The first section depicts the communist systems of VET, taking the mid-1960s as a time when there was a widespread belief that these economic and social systems were viable and could deliver social advancement and prosperity.*

*After the changes of 1989-92 the communist regimes fell and a period of political and economic turbulence ensued. At first the VET systems were little changed, but the second section of the paper shows how challenges to them arose, particularly as unemployment raised questions about how well the established VET arrangements were suited to the new flexible challenges of competitive productivity and flexible labour markets. A new sector of adult VET grew up, raising questions about whether and how it should be promoted, managed and regulated, and what its relationship with traditional VET schools should be.*

*Overlapping with this period of volatility, the countries applied for membership with the EU. The third section tracks how the EU brought pressure to bear on the countries to modernize their VET systems and to bring them in line with the various EU initiatives on education and training that emerged during the 1990s. In parallel a programme of development aid resulted in a series of projects which acted to import foreign expertise and ideas into the VET systems of Eastern Europe.*

*A final section surveys the systems as they stood at around 2010, outlining those features of the communist system which have survived or been adapted and those features which result from the pressures of economic transition on the one hand and influence from the EU on the other. This section also reflects on the process of change from a theoretical point of view.*

## **Introduction**

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was by any account a momentous event. Its effects are still being felt in political structures, economic relations, and culture both within Europe and outside. This paper aims to track a particular strand – the development of vocational education and training (VET) in the countries of Eastern Europe.

Some parameters of scope need immediately to be made clear. Eastern Europe is a fluid geographical and political term. Geographically Eastern Europe stretches from the Urals to somewhere around the Vistula in modern-day Poland and the Eastern rim of the Carpathian mountains; the Balkan peninsula is perhaps something rather separate. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia generally describe themselves as Central, rather than Eastern European. Some Romanians would describe their country as belonging to the Balkans geographically. Finland sees itself as firmly Nordic rather than Eastern European. Politically one tends to think of Eastern Europe as the former European states of the Warsaw Pact other than the Soviet Union itself, though such a definition would rule out the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania which were part of the Soviet Union proper until 1991, as were the Ukraine and Moldova which surely must be regarded as Eastern European, and would also rule out the states which were formed in the 1990s from the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia which was not a member of the Warsaw Pact, though it had a communist government until the early 1980s. In this paper the definition of Eastern Europe is pragmatic – it is concerned with those European states which in the 1970s fell under a communist form of government and which today have either joined or have been accepted as potential candidates for entry to the European Community – excepting the former German Democratic Republic (which is a special case, having ceased to exist as a separate jurisdiction). For pragmatic reasons the paper does not aim to cover the Western Balkan states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, though it is likely that a number of remarks made will apply to these countries.

Similarly VET is a wide concept, being used differently by different commentators. In its wider usages it covers any curriculum content in school which aims to prepare for the labour market, much of higher education, a great deal of formal education undertaken by adults and any training conducted within firms. For the purposes of this paper VET for young people (initial VET) is intended to connote programmes within secondary education which prepare for specific roles in

the labour market and apprenticeships and VET for adults (continuing VET) is intended to connote specific programmes and state-supported interventions for those over the age of 21 to train or retrain for labour market roles. The paper will not cover the important areas of VET within higher education, training within firms or wider aspects of lifelong learning except inasmuch as they impact on the more formal structures. It will tend to treat VET for young people and VET for adults separately, because – as we shall see – this is how they are usually perceived in the countries concerned.

Lastly, by way of parameters, the paper is primarily concerned with the period from the ‘heyday’ of the communist era in the 1960s to the present day, with a particular focus on the ‘transition’ period of 1989-2007 – between the collapse of the communist system and the date that the last of the countries we are concerned with joined the European Union.

Many authors, governments and international organizations have produced analyses and descriptions of education in general, and VET in particular, in each of the countries included in this paper. The number of consolidated accounts of education, still less VET, in the region as a whole, are naturally far fewer. As we shall see, Grant (1969) offers a depiction of education in Eastern Europe (though not the Baltic States) in communist times. A number of collections (Kogan, Gebel and Noelke, 2008; Phillips and Kaser, 1992; Strietska-Ilina, 2007a) report on aspects of post-communist educational development on the theme of re-action to communism and economic transition, though largely on a country-by-country basis. Masson (European Training Foundation, 2003) gives a consolidated account of the interaction between the countries and the European Union in terms of VET, though this is confined to just over a decade and – significantly – was written before the accession process was complete. This paper, therefore aims to synthesize this material and other sources, both by looking at the longer trajectory of the past 50 years, and by attempting to generalize about the region as a whole. In particular it seeks to identify those aspects which resulted from the communist past (or the reaction to it), those which came about through the forces of economic transition, and those which were the consequence of pressures brought about through accession to the European Union. The basic thesis, therefore, is that it is by examining historical developments, not just in VET but in the wider political and economic context in which VET is conducted, that we can best understand why the system is as we find it today and appreciate the likelihood of it responding positively or negatively to future changes.

Though individual country examples (and counter-examples) will be noted, for the reasons just given this paper seeks to treat the trajectory of VET in Eastern Europe as a single narrative. No doubt this treatment can be challenged and commentators may take the view either that each country is distinctive or that there are different blocs of countries which would constitute better units for common analysis. Both points of view must be acknowledged. No two countries are identical either in terms of their starting points or of the events which have shaped them during the period. And there are certainly country groupings which make sense – for example the three Baltic states which were within the Soviet Union in the communist era, and the countries which were parts of the former Yugoslavia.

The contention in this paper, though, is that there is a common story to be told, and that this story is common because elements in both the past and in the events which occurred on the journey from that past were shared. Thus communism, the shocks of transition to free market economies, and the pressures resulting from seeking EU membership are factors which all the countries we examine here have in common, and have resulted – to a greater or lesser extent – in similar reactions in their VET systems. The implication is not that all post-communist countries are the same. Far from it; one can find different patterns of VET, for example, in countries of the former Soviet Union which did not join the EU and which retain large, nationalized industries. And as we shall see there are distinct divergences amongst those countries which did join the EU, for example in participation in secondary VET. The contention of there being a common story is not that there is homogenous development, but rather that a starting point for appreciating divergences is to understand what is shared. Only having identified the common elements can we explain why different countries have reacted differently to those elements, or seek to identify other those influences which have been brought to bear.

Essentially the ‘common story’ revolves around:

- the forms of VET that grew up in the communist era;
- the effects on VET of the transition from communism to democracy and to a market economy;
- the effects of the process of accession to the European Union (a process which is not yet complete for Croatia and Serbia).

This paper will follow that structure. Each section will chart the main events and influences, with a final section bringing matters up to date and reflecting briefly on the processes of change. But first let us consider what viewpoints might be most appropriate.

### **The process of change - perspectives**

Bain (p. 157) presents a number of different lenses through which changes in ‘post-socialist’ education systems might be viewed. Amongst these are:

- a transition perspective where the main drivers for educational change are the changes in the context of rapid movement from a planned to a market economy. As we shall see, the economic transition was dramatic for all of our countries and undoubtedly raised questions about the suitability of the VET system inherited from communist times. Economic transition not only affects the structure of employers and the skills they demand from the VET system, but it also affects the expectations of individuals and what they want from education;
- transition from communism also deeply affects the institutions of society, including those of the education system. Conventions about the planning of education, in particular, are liable to challenge and change raising questions about the level (national, regional, local) at which educational decisions are made, and the role of actors other than the state in influencing education. In the revolutionary, post-communist, situation the sheer disaffection with both the institutions and the personnel of the previous system was an important factor in its own right (Sandi, 1992);
- a change of political system also offers a chance of restoration. Outside the realm of education it is evident that valued pre-communist practices (for example, religion) both played a role in the revolutionary pressures themselves and featured in the post-communist order. More broadly one can see the rupture with the immediate past as an opportunity to strike a balance between re-introducing previous practices, retaining elements of the communist order which are considered valuable, and introducing new elements needed for the new era. Of course this process of ‘choice’ is seldom planned and wholly rational – different actors will have different aspirations and expectations;
- the post-communist era can be seen as not only leaving one politico-economic system but also as joining another. In this context the issue of alignment with other countries becomes a factor. If there was (as will be suggested) a distinct inter-country alignment in

the previous system, this influence can be expected to lessen; at the same time a post-socialist country can be expected to be exposed to new influences, whether on its own initiative through processes such as policy borrowing from new reference countries or through adaptation to the collective rules of the new ‘club’ it seeks to join (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005b). Again those ‘rules’ can be clear conditions of association, or softer, shared practices acquired through new networks of social learning. Supranational organizations can also develop their own distinctive models which influence their members (Taylor *et al*, 1997).

It will be clear that these perspectives are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed we shall note a number of examples of each. However a key question in this field is the extent to which current VET arrangements in Easter Europe owe their form to previous history (both communist and pre-communist), to the trauma of revolution and transition, or to the influence of the European Union and its (primarily) Western European constituents.

### **Communist Times**

In the 40 years of communism there were of course numerous changes and it would be a mistake to see the whole era as a single unchanging ‘system’ only disrupted after 1989, either in any individual country or – still less – across the bloc as a whole. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to chart the full trajectory of the vocational education system throughout the communist period.

Instead we shall take something of a ‘snapshot’ of the system in the various countries in the late 1960s, relying principally on a survey undertaken by Grant (1969). This period might be seen as the apogee of communism, at least in economic terms; the post-war reconstruction and creation of the socialist states had been largely accomplished, but decline had not manifestly set in, and there was pride in communism’s recent achievements, not least in the field of education. Grant visited each of the Eastern European countries, including the former Yugoslavia, though excluding the Baltic States which were part of the Soviet Union. In what follows his largely sympathetic account, is contrasted with comments from later writers from the countries concerned who look back in a much more critical way from the perspective of the 1990s, just after the fall of communism.

However before describing the situation explored by Grant it is worth looking briefly at the educational heritage of the area before the post-war communist systems. The area we are concerned with was dominated, in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries by four empires. The expanding Russian empire pushing both west and south from its heartland; the Prussian empire, expanding in the latter part of the period, but not impinging greatly on our areas save for parts of what is currently Poland and Lithuania; the Turkish empire which reached, at the greatest extent of its European possessions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, into what is now Hungary and most of the Balkan peninsula; and the Austrian (Hapsburg) empire which expanded East and South in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, rolling back the Turks to Belgrade.

For the period 1700-1918 the Austrian empire was in possession of a large number of the countries we are interested in; all or most of current-day Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia and roughly one-third of current Serbia and Romania, as well as parts of Poland. As well as being a dominant power, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Austria became an enlightened, though centralizing, education reformer, promoting and standardizing elementary education (Mitter, 1992; Szebenyi, 1992). According to Parížek (1992), participation amongst elementary school children in the area of the current Czech Republic rose from under 20 per cent to nearly 60 per cent in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Similar state-building educational measures were taken by Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia in around the same period.

By the nineteenth century a pattern of both elementary schooling and some secondary schools, notably the pervasive *Gimnasium* (roughly translated as grammar school) had grown up – at least in the urban areas. Vocational education, however, seems not to have been widespread or organized in any sense outside a few specialized university faculties and institutes for theology or military training, and one can presume that inasmuch as it was conducted at all, it was in some kind of apprenticeship mode – the German influence on Russia and the long-standing German communities that could be found in towns as far away as eastern Transylvania had involved guild-type arrangements. However outside Prussia and the territory of the current Czech Republic, there was little industrialization before World War I, and therefore little need for much by the way of formal training. While a few vocationally focussed secondary and tertiary institutes were developed in the main centres, these were few and far between and not nationally organized.

Though elementary schooling was reasonably widespread in the Austrian territories, it was far from universal, particularly in rural areas, and in the territories dominated by the Turks it was far less prevalent. New nation states breaking free of the Turks, such as (in chronological order) Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria began to develop coherent educational policies, though again these were far from universal and tended to apply in the towns and amongst the new middle classes (amongst whom the *gimnasia* and *lycées* were particularly popular for secondary education).

One should mention too, the perennial issue of ethnic, religious and language groupings which characterized the area, particularly in the Balkan peninsula. The situation is far too complex to attempt to summarize here – suffice it to say that sponsorship by the various churches, and the right of instruction in the mother tongue have remained issues up until the present day.

The broad educational picture across the region, before the outbreak of World War II was of some high quality higher education and prestigious secondary schools, usually fee-paying and including some vocationally-orientated institutes, set against widespread provision of elementary schools of some sort. The extensive rural areas were poorly served and illiteracy amongst the adult rural population was common (Grant puts it at 25-40 per cent in the Balkans and Poland, though less in Hungary and Czechoslovakia).

As a final note before turning to the advent of education in the communist era, one should recall the widespread devastation in many areas – particularly the former Yugoslavia and Poland – caused by World War II. It is easy to forget that school buildings and equipment were often largely destroyed and many teachers lost their lives. Undoubtedly the base on which the new communist governments were to build was weaker than it had been in the 1930s.

What, then, was the ‘communist’ system of vocational education, as manifested in the 1960s? This question of course presumes that there was such a thing as a communist style of education, as opposed to national traditions, which, as we have seen, had some common threads stemming from the previous empires. Nevertheless there were undoubtedly common strands to the education systems in these countries, albeit with some exceptions. It may be useful to group them as follows:

- matters clearly related to communist educational ideology, or consequential from other aspects of communist organization of society;

- matters which relate to the modernization and industrialization of society, which was admittedly a very important part of the communist creed<sup>\*</sup>, but which obviously affected other ‘progressive’ societies too.

### *Communist features*

The most obvious feature was ideological content in the curriculum. At the time of Grant’s visits in the mid 1960s, communist ideology was not taught directly until fairly late in secondary education (typically the last two years of upper secondary), but it was transmitted indirectly from earlier ages through the teaching of history (which emphasized Marxist theories of the development of society and the march of progress) and geography (which emphasized an internationalist mindset). A further vehicle for ideological propagation were the youth organizations which linked closely with schools and the large local enterprises, practising as well as preaching comradeship, the virtues of work, and solidarity.

Perhaps reflecting his own orientation and times, Grant tends to describe this ideological aspect as fairly mild and even reasonable; he elides it with instruction in morality and personal discipline which he plainly admires even if he considers it a bit old-fashioned. Perhaps it was so at the time and in the places he visited, but later writers from the countries concerned have harsher comments, such as this about Romania:

[The objectives were] of providing a narrowly skilled labour force according to the provisions of central planning [and]...the annihilation of individuality and competition, to uniformity and the cultivation of mediocrity. (Sandi, 1992, p. 84)

and Janowski (1992) points to the effect of ideological education in corrupting concepts such as ‘democratic’ which hindered political development in Poland after the fall of communism:

The effective obscurity of the meanings of important notions seems to have remained the main and possibly long-lived consequence of communist influence on education. (p. 45)

Though not a strict consequence of communism, the dominance of the Soviet Union was reflected in the pre-eminence of Russian as the first foreign language in most of the countries.<sup>\*</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> Classical Marxism presumed an industrial proletariat to drive the formation of a communist society. Quite apart from the advantages of wealth and competition with the West that industrialization might bring, the conversion of a largely peasant population into an industrial workforce was – for many communist thinkers – a necessary pre-condition for achieving a true communist society.

The idea of the comprehensive school was a firm feature of communism from the beginning. All the countries had a 'basic' school comprising (in our terms) primary and lower secondary education. The length of this phase of education differed slightly in different countries and was extended during the 1950s and 1960s, but in most countries it was an eight year phase, lasting from ages 6/7 to 14/15. This school was generally divided into two cycles: a primary cycle focussing on language, social learning and basic mathematical skills and scientific concepts, with more explicit subject teaching introduced in the second cycle, starting at around age 11. In rural areas the first cycle was often taught in small village 'satellite' schools, with the later cycle being provided by the central school in a larger town. By the end of the communist era compulsory school leaving ages were generally higher than the end of the basic school, so students were required to at least start secondary schooling.

The significance of this basic, comprehensive, school was multifarious:

- it reinforced the message that all students were equal in terms of tuition; Grant describes how head teachers in Yugoslavia deliberately engineered mixed ability classes – the opposite of 'setting'. He also describes how students were encouraged to help their weaker peers with their schoolwork;
- it put out of the question any sponsorship of alternative schools by voluntary groups or religious denominations;
- by including the lower secondary phase within the basic school, it curtailed greatly the scope of the *gimnasia* which in most places had traditionally been eight year schools, taking pupils from age 11. These general education schools leading to upper secondary school certificates became, for the most part, four-year rather than eight-year programmes though in the DDR (with a ten-year basic school after 1965) they were reduced to the two-year *Erweiterte Oberschule* and in Czechoslovakia (with a nine-year basic school) they were three years. In Bulgaria, the pattern was a little different with a 'straight-through' eleven-year school which incorporated in its last three, non-compulsory, years a general upper secondary phase for the more able pupils.

A central, though not unproblematic, idea within the communist educational canon was that of 'polytechnical' education; the notion is a little slippery and seems to have been interpreted rather differently in different places. As an example Grant (p. 116) cites the content of Bulgarian basic

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\* Grant notes that, in Romania, Russian had recently ceased to be compulsory following the accession to the leadership of the independent minded and (then) liberal Ceauşescu

school programmes which contained – in sequence through the years – ‘experience of productive work’ through handicrafts, school workshops, excursions to public utilities, crop and stock management, technical drawing, study of mechanized equipment and finally electronics. All this was for everyone, regardless of the future occupation of the individual. In our current-day terms it perhaps represents a combination of Craft Design Technology and work-related education.

This polytechnic element was introduced for specifically ideological and moral reasons:

Education for work ... is intended to give the children a positive attitude to manual labour. They will acquire basic working skills and habits, learn to be accurate and tidy in their work, and to work for the common good. (Czechoslovak policy statement from 1960, quoted in Grant, p. 117)

Grant characterizes this policy as attempting:

...to link theory and practice, and to try to break down the division between mental and physical work, a division stigmatized as a legacy of the class divisions of capitalist society. (p. 118)

However, even in the 1960s there were problems in applying this policy. Factory managers complained of the nuisance and disruption caused by having to host students on visits or work practice, and educationists were sceptical of the value of lengthy periods of repetitive practical work. As a result steps were taken both to water down content (towards the more scientific and applied subjects) and to reduce the duration. However, in some countries it remained a notable feature; a strong strand of polytechnical education remained in Czech general upper secondary education, and in the DDR the two-year schools preparing for the *Abitur* and higher education, also required pupils to undertake specific vocational training (Grant, p. 219). In the harsher political climate of 1980s Romania this component was abused, according to Sandi who records that “...compulsory ‘voluntary work’ in rural areas, [was] pushed beyond any bearable limits ... [and] led to the devaluation and rejection of practical work.” (p. 87).

The reverse of polytechnical education, but stemming from the same thinking, was the provision of general education within vocational courses. The technical schools will be described later, but most formal vocational courses for young people contained some continuing general

education,<sup>\*</sup> though typically not sufficient for students to gain the secondary school leaving certificate which gave access to higher education. To qualify for this the more strictly vocational students would need to take adult education classes in general secondary schools after they had qualified vocationally. Though Grant considers the inclusion of general education a “humanizing” feature of vocational education he admits that it is not always free of problems:

... one does meet disgruntled youths who want to spend all their time on the machines instead of bothering with foreign languages and civics. (p. 122)

It is perhaps debatable whether centralization was strictly a communist feature. Later, post-revolutionary writers certainly associate central control with communism, and there is no doubt – with one exception – that strong central control was a common feature. However, as we have seen, centralization was a much earlier feature of the Austrian empire, and subsequent nation-building:

The educational system built in the Polish state restored after World War I was also state-controlled and the state had a strong say in the design of syllabuses and the selection of teaching content. (Janowski, 1992, p. 45)

Nevertheless even the generally sympathetic Grant has little doubt that centralization was a distinctive feature of the region:

...the fact remains that the administration of education is highly centralized by our standards. It is less of a rigid hierarchy than it looks on paper, and there is in most cases far more flexibility and room for discretion at local authority and school level than there used to be. But what divergences there are exist with the knowledge and approval of the central authorities, and the basic principle remains that most of what happens in the school, and certainly all fundamental matters, are controlled by the Ministry, the Government and the Party in a nationally uniform and co-ordinated system. (p. 154)

The reference to the Party is important. Though matters might nominally be delegated to local authorities or (in case of vocational schools) to various sponsoring Ministries, the common thread of a parallel Party organization ensured a consistency of policy (Grant, p. 149).

And centralization was not anything to be ashamed about, certainly in the early days:

[After fascism in Hungary] the Minister for Education declared that ‘the entire nation should be taught democratically which makes it unavoidably necessary that education be administered centrally, by the state’. (Szebenyi, 1992, p. 62)

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<sup>\*</sup> Grant records (p. 121) 20 per cent of time in Czechoslovakian trade schools, 32 per cent in Poland and 16 per cent in the DDR.

The exception was the former Yugoslavia where not only education but industry too was considerably devolved; unlike the countries of the Warsaw pact, Yugoslav enterprises were owned and controlled by local co-operatives rather than the central state. In education, decentralization was not just a matter of devolving responsibility to the six Yugoslav republics, but right down to local level, and indeed within the schools themselves, paralleling decision-making in enterprises:

Each school has ... a school council consisting of the teaching staff, parents representatives, members of the pupils' "collectives" and representatives of outside bodies... (Grant, p. 304)

One must also remark on the effects of economic planning and organization on the school system, which particularly affected vocational education. This had two main effects. The first, on those countries where it featured pre-war (Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Hungary and Poland to a degree), was the effect on ‘dual system’ apprenticeships. Though these continued in a sense (and indeed many of the strictly vocational schools in other parts of the region translated their titles as ‘apprenticeship schools’), the nature of apprenticeship changed as a result of the establishment of the huge nationalized enterprises, rather than the network of smaller, independent, firms and businesses through which apprenticeship had originally grown up.\* And since everyone would have a job in any case, the competitive, market, element of apprenticeships whereby firms and young people vie for the best candidates and places, was of course largely absent.

The second effect was that on school planning and individual motivation. It is a little hard for us to imagine the close link between school studies, levels of attainment and career pathways that existed in many of these communist societies. It was not just a matter of being guaranteed a job, but of being guaranteed a particular type of job. The system of the *nomenclature* – a comprehensive classification of jobs, sorted into occupational clusters and organized into levels (eight in the case of the former Yugoslavia) – was not merely a statistical tool, but also indicated what level of educational qualification was necessary, and sufficient, to obtain various positions at work. Using this system the schools and universities worked with the authorities in industry and public services to plan the manpower, and therefore course provision, of the future. Though

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\* In some places, evidently, smaller enterprises did take part in apprenticeships. Grant describes two types of apprenticeship training in Czechoslovakia:

“Apprentice training centres are situated in and run by major industrial concerns, while apprentice schools are run by national committees, and give training in trades where the numbers are so small that factory centres would not be an economical proposition. In either case, the apprentice is bound by contract for the entire course.” (p. 259)

logical from the point of view of industrial planning, this approach paid little attention to the more human aspects of workforce development:

The firms demanded a certain number of graduates with a specialisation, and later on were forced to employ them...The diploma or certificate became more important than knowledge or skills, and this had a profound impact on motivation for many students. (Parížek, 1992, pp. 78-79)

The interaction between the employment system and the VET system was tightly integrated; vocational schools were often effectively part of the human resource departments of large companies. Jobs were secured, the demand for workers insatiable, and employment was for life. Vocational education and training became the highest priority for the development of the educational system for ideological and productive reasons, and was not always in line with established education traditions and aspirations (Nielsen, 2004, p. 41).

### *‘Modernizing’ Features*

As well as implementing some ideological features, the communist governments of the 1960s were anxious that their education systems should produce the manpower to enable their societies to advance rapidly in the modern era. An emphasis on participation in education seems to have been vigorously pursued by incoming communist administrations, probably more so and earlier than in many Western societies. Apart from the provision of free, compulsory, education through the basic schools, most Eastern European countries engaged in:

- considerable efforts to address the backlog of illiteracy amongst the adult population, particularly in rural areas, using the school system to provide evening and part-time classes. Grant records that by the 1960s these efforts were winding down, having achieved their aims so far as reasonably practicable;
- increased participation in the upper secondary phase, notably through the formalization of vocational training and introduction of technical schools (see below). The proportion undertaking some form of upper secondary or formal vocational education in the mid-1960s varied considerably – 77 per cent in Poland and an astonishing 95 per cent in Bulgaria, but a more modest 50 per cent in Hungary and 35 per cent in Yugoslavia. The degree of post-compulsory participation hinged very much on the pre-war starting point, but in all cases had expanded considerably in the early years of communist rule;
- a considerable expansion of higher education. Grant records that by the mid-1960s, and in comparison to pre-war levels, higher education had expanded by 4 times in Romania,

5 times in Poland, 6 times in Czechoslovakia, 8 times in Hungary and Bulgaria and 10 times in Yugoslavia, albeit from varying pre-war bases. Much of the additional higher education was in part-time or correspondence course mode, and the expansion was concentrated in vocational, technical and applied subject areas. A particular feature of the region was the development of tertiary non-University vocational courses (ISCED 4) similar to German *Fachschulen*; these gave chances both for graduates of general secondary education not proceeding to full higher education to undertake vocational training (usually for 2-3 years), and for existing workers to upgrade their qualifications. Examples include the *viša škola* of Yugoslavia and the *școala tehnica* of Romania, but equivalents existed in most countries. However, broader interpretations of higher education were restricted, with most programmes needing to show a clear vocational purpose (Kogan, 2008);

- an extensive network of provision for adult education. All countries allowed, and encouraged, adults to achieve elementary and secondary education leaving certificates through part-time and evening classes. Furthermore in a number of countries there was a system of ‘workers universities’, equivalent to our adult community education and university extra-mural departments, as described by Grant in the case of Hungary:

Apart from adult institutions giving formal qualifications, there are others which give courses for vocational improvement or general culture - the Peasant Academies, Youth Academies, Parents' Academies and, most popular of all, the "Free Universities" which are organized in all the major towns. The Free Universities offer courses between one and four years in length on almost every conceivable subject (p. 275).

By the 1960s there had developed a very pronounced emphasis on scientific and technological education. This, of course, also affected Western societies in a search for progress and competitiveness, but perhaps had a special significance in the communist world. Grant (p.116) quotes a Czechoslovak education law of 1960:

Training and education are based on a scientific concept of the world, on Marxism-Leninism; they are closely tied in with the life of the people, and are based on the latest knowledge of the sciences and progressive cultural traditions. The entire training and educational work of the schools is linked with the study of the fundamentals of science, polytechnical instruction and labour training in socially useful, especially productive work.

The special status of the ‘technician’ is noticeable even today in Eastern European school and programme titles. The emphasis on technological prowess had two consequences. First was the development of a hybrid kind of school mid-way between the academic *gimnasium* and the

vocational trade schools. This was the technical school; it was not an innovation – models had existed before the War, and it was derived fairly directly also from the Russian *Tekhnikum* (the term also used for this type of school in Hungary and Bulgaria). But the late 1950s and 1960s saw a great expansion in them and their application to a wide range of vocational subjects. These schools:

...train pupils who have completed the basic school course for "intermediate" professions – engineering, agriculture, communications, computer programming, animal husbandry, or for such occupations as librarianship, nursing, veterinary work, clerical work, and so on. The main emphasis is, of course, vocational, but a considerable amount of time is spent on "general culture" – mother tongue, literature, social studies, foreign languages and the like... Apart from the "humanizing" influence of the general studies, they make it possible for students to take their secondary school certificate as well as qualifying for a job. The technical schools thus become one route to higher education as an alternative to the academic *gimnasia* and *lycees* (Grant pp. 119-20).

These schools were popular, or at least well populated. Grant records (p. 196) that numbers of students in Poland at this type of school was less than 10 per cent of those in ordinary trade schools before the war, but by the mid-1960s had exceeded them, and that in Yugoslavia the numbers in technical schools had expanded by eighteen times since the war (pp. 318-9). The attraction of gaining eligibility for higher education seems to have diverted what might have been pressure for an expansion in general upper secondary education into this, more applied and ostensibly more economically useful, form of education. At the time that Grant was writing, Romania did not have these technical schools, but it developed them soon afterwards, and they appear to have been popular in that country, too.

Even the more hostile post-revolutionary verdict seems to spare this type of school. Mitter (1992, p. 24) considers that they achieved a "high reputation, especially amongst male youngsters." Indeed, it was not unknown for graduates of *gimnasia* to 'return' to one of these schools to take a vocational subject – Grant records this as happening in both Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria where rather shorter programmes were allowed for such candidates.

A less happy consequence of the focus on science may have been a tendency to overcrowd the curriculum as in Czechoslovakia:

... the participation of more scientists in writing one textbook led to competition between them for the space for the sciences they represented and consequently to overcrowding of curricula. This conception of learning matter influenced the method of teaching and learning, and finally the relationship between teachers and pupils. (Parížek, 1992, p. 78)

In Hungary there were complaints of “over-complex subject matter [which] led to a teaching style aimed at cramming, and regurgitating information.” (Szebenyi, 1992, p. 163); Sandi from Romania talks of educational methods which were “for the most part, traditional and old-fashioned: based on passivity, memorising, with no use of modern facilities” (p. 86), though Janowski claims with some pride that “the Polish school has managed to preserve the cult of solid education understood chiefly as a body of knowledge” (p. 46).

### *Summary and perspective*

The main features of the ‘communist style’ of vocational education in its heyday might be said to be:

- an insistence on comprehensive education to age 14/15 followed by a fairly sharp division between academic upper secondary education (for relatively few) and strong vocational tracks, for the most part distinctly specialized and closely aligned with state-planned industry;
- sharply increasing participation in upper secondary education, largely vocational in nature, but accompanied by some continuing general education;
- the emergence of a two-tier initial vocational education system, with specific job-related programmes (lasting two to three years typically) on the one hand and rather broader, technician programmes (typically lasting four years) on the other, classified, like the academic programmes, as constituting a full upper secondary education;
- an emphasis on formal qualifications administered on a national basis, giving access to defined jobs;
- continuing vocational training seen as a matter to be pursued by enterprises, though with sizeable ancillary programmes to promote general and cultural education for adults (the issue of adult illiteracy having been considerably eroded in the early years of the era). Concepts such as training programmes for the unemployed and opportunities for adult re-training (other than at the ‘home’ enterprise) were notable by their absence;

- some expansion of higher education (from a low base), though again with an emphasis on technical courses related to defined industrial sectors.

There were, of course, adjustments and reforms to this basic model. A notable example, still discussed to this day, were the ‘Šuvar’ reforms in the former Yugoslavia whereby a common core curriculum was introduced in the first two years of secondary education, thus considerably blurring the distinctions between *gimnazija*, technical and basic vocational education (these reforms were unpopular and were subsequently reversed). In the 1980s both the Soviet Union and Hungary saw some loosening of the central controls applied to education; in the former case a growing group of innovative teachers organized through the *Teachers’ Gazette* pressed with some success for much more student-centred learning – the so-called ‘pedagogy of co-operation’ – and an emphasis on civic education for participative politics (Polyzoi and Dneprov, 2003); Hungary experienced greater freedom over teaching methods and some exposure to Western educational ideas via a prestigious group of domestic education experts (Halász, 2003). However other countries, such as Romania and Czechoslovakia saw little, if any, reform and in Poland although *Solidarność* had produced a fairly well articulated agenda for educational change in 1980, little progress had been made on this by the end of the decade (Anweiler, 1992).

Indeed there is some evidence of decay rather than reform. Sandi (1992) records that educational expenditure in Romania had dropped to 2 per cent of GDP by 1988 and the pupil to teacher ratio was 43 – double the rate that obtained in 1975. Parížek (1992) records that the numbers in higher education in Czechoslovakia were in decline during the 1980s.

The picture therefore is of a system which ostensibly valued vocational education, but which did not shy away from making sharp divisions between the mass of future workers and an elite pursuing an outright academic pathway. Indeed Svecová (2004) relates that the children of political dissidents in Czechoslovakia were consigned to vocational education even if they could otherwise have aspired to an academic track. At the same time initial vocational education was geared to an economy which gave little prospect for individual advancement and which was increasingly failing to produce the living standards which it had initially promised. In short from the point of view of individual motivation, “gaining knowledge was not a profitable investment” (Janowski, 1992, p. 42).

On the other hand, on the surface, and to an extent in reality, the ‘communist’ system of vocational education with its high participation, defined qualifications, publicly proclaimed

value, structured nature, reasonably long duration and incorporation of continued general education, appeared – on the point of transition – to be one of the strengths rather than a weakness of the legacy of the socialist era.

## **Revolution and Transition**

The political events of 1989-1992 need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the ensuing period saw a number of things happening which had a bearing on VET. Presenting them in rough sequence:

- immediate political changes involving changes of administration, with the dismissal of the ‘old guard’ and Party (though in some cases elements of the latter re-emerged in different guises later on). In a considerable number of instances new countries emerged: the three Baltic States, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and – over a longer period – the other republics of the former Yugoslavia. Apart from anything else these needed to develop autonomous administrations for education as well as other purposes;
- an economic rupture caused – in the first instance – by the loss of previous *Comecon*\* markets and the need to relate to new ones;
- at different paces in different countries a more gradual, but still dramatic, process of transition towards a market economy involving new structures of industry, freedom of currency exchange, development of financial institutions, freedom for employers to hire and fire and to set wage levels and many other novel features;
- decisions – on both sides – about association with and subsequently accession to the European Union.

We shall deal with the last point in the third section of this paper, but here we look at the impact on VET of the immediate political changes and of the economic transition. Though economic transition was still occurring while the accession process was under way, and interacted with it, accession raised different issues.

It makes sense to consider the impact of transition on education in two ways – first the specific issues of policy and administration which arose by virtue of the change in regimes, and secondly the broader economic and societal changes that occurred through the transition to a market and democratic system.

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\* the internal ‘common market’ of the Soviet bloc. Its full title was the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

## Policy and Administrative Changes

The immediate post-communist atmosphere was a heady, if chaotic, time with many countries having little coherent, let alone agreed, visions for the societies that were emerging:

At the outset of transition, little was clear, except that there was no turning back. There was no master plan and scarce relevant experience to guide action. (Camdessus, 2001, p. 9)

The metaphor of being in the position of ‘rebuilding the ship while at sea’ was widely acknowledged. (Elster, Offe and Preuss, 1998; Strietska-Ilina, 2007b). And of course there was the initial business of forming political groupings and drawing up political programmes.

In general there was little by way of pre-formed educational demands – in most countries such opposition to communism as there was had not tended to focus on educational issues. Exceptions were the *Teachers’ Gazette* agenda in the Soviet Union and in Poland a ‘Commission for Independent Education’ had been formed by the *Solidarność* movement and developed a reform agenda; shortly before the revolution it had begun negotiations with the Communist government. (Janowski, 1992). A gradual process of reform resulting in some relaxation of the curriculum and diversity in school forms, including borrowing from Western countries, had been underway in Hungary during the 1980s (Halász, 2003).

However there was no cogent and coherent educational programme in any country. Reviewing the situation in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1994 Karsten and Majoor concluded:

Old structures and old certainties are breaking up, but the contours of a new order are not yet clear. There are no parties or actors with a clear programmatic view. What strikes outsiders most is a lack of vision about the future of each of these societies and the role of education in that vision. (p. 157)

There was also a view that educational reform was hardly a priority; education in general and vocational education in particular, had by many accounts been one of the strengths of Communist system (Barr, 2005); moreover was not education best left to the professionals?

Most of the parties held rather vague and general ideas about education, about which they did not differ much. Educational debates were overwhelmingly determined by educational experts with modernizing and technocratic values. (Nagy, 1994)

Despite there being no overall programmes of change, certain common policy-driven developments from this early phase can be discerned:

- most obviously the teaching of Marxist ideology, and Russian as a first foreign language, were discontinued. There was also an urgent need to reformulate the history curriculum (Polyzoi and Černá, 2003);
- in a number of countries there were moves to re-instate the full *gimnasium* which, as we have seen, had – under communism – been largely restricted to a two year upper secondary cycle. In Hungary and the Czech Republic, some six and eight year selective academic schools were revived. However, though permitted, these did not become widespread (Mitter, 1992);
- permitting, and to an extent encouraging, the establishment of non-state schools and universities, though the former, in the shape of Catholic schools, did not become widespread except in Poland where religious education had been a feature of the landscape even in Communist times (Janowski, 1992). Such privatization as did take place, however, seldom affected the initial vocational education sector, though the growth of the private sector in the adult sphere was significant, as we shall see;
- decentralization of responsibility of schools to local government, though often without much by the way of associated financing, at least in the first instance (Hințea, Șandor and Junjan, 2004; Karsten and Majoor, 1994);
- in the vocational sector a process of placing vocational schools under the Ministry of Education (or local education authorities operating under its legislative auspices), rather than relevant industrial or agricultural ministries, as had often been the case in communist times (Viertel, 1994). However in some countries this process took some time – in Latvia it did not occur until 2004 (Lanka and Mūrnieks, 2006);
- the growth of post-secondary non-higher education vocational programmes, designed both to attract graduates of general education tracks not destined for higher education who wanted to acquire a vocational qualification, and as further specializations for graduates of the broader ‘technician’ vocational programmes within secondary education. While some elements of this type of school were present in communist times in some countries, they appear to have expanded quickly after 1989 (Kogan, 2008), and to have emerged in new forms in some countries, such as Romania (Birzea and Fartușnic, 2003).

### *Economy and the Labour Market*

It was of course no surprise that the fall of communism gave rise to severe problems of economic transition. Though featuring at different times, at different speeds and sometimes in different orders, all countries have seen economic policies comprising (Barr, 2005; Havrylyshyn and Nsouli, 2001):

- liberalization of prices (which were previously controlled, and subsidized for basic commodities), giving rise to a very different pattern of domestic demand;
- a gross change in international trading patterns, away from the *Comecon* and towards the West, particularly the EU;
- large changes in the official exchange rate resulting from moves towards floating rates, and for most countries from around 2000 a formal or informal peg to the Euro;
- the permitting, and (to varying extents) encouragement of private enterprise, including measures to disband collective farms and return lands to their original owners;
- the introduction of defined budgets and market-style accounting for state enterprises which for the first time enabled managers and policy-makers to see whether they were operating at a profit or a loss.

These policies were pursued both with different degrees of rigour and in rather different manners in the various countries. The ‘starting point’ also varied to a degree – for example the peasantry in Poland had never been compelled to collectivize, and the former Yugoslavia was not part of the *Comecon* and so had more extensive trading links with the West.

In terms of rigour, both Bulgaria and Romania were late starters and faltered in their dedication to full economic transition. In the mid-90s Bulgaria reverted to policies of bailing out loss-making state enterprises. It was never clear whether the fall of Ceaușescu in Romania had been the result of a popular revolution or of an internal coup, and there was no consensus about reform until after 1997 (Jeffries, 2002). Following its ‘velvet divorce’ from the Czech Republic in 1992, Slovakia showed signs of reversing economic reforms under the Mečiar government of 1994 until this was replaced in 1998, arguably as a result of pressure from the EU (Rybář and Malova, 2004).

In terms of differences in approach, at the macro level one can contrast the ‘big bang’ policy of Poland, where reforms were introduced early and quickly with the deliberately gradualist moves

of Hungary which (for example) had a ‘crawling’ approach to realigning its exchange rate (Jeffries, 2002). Dealing with the large state enterprises was a particularly fraught area. Apart from the pace of reforms in this field, and indeed the question of whether to pursue them at all, approaches differed substantially between countries. Jeffries (2002) contrasts the method of selling such concerns to foreign investors (the main course pursued in Hungary) with the alternative courses of distributing vouchers to the public at large (the Czech Republic) and encouraging management buy-outs or other forms of ‘insider privatization’ (Slovakia, Bulgaria).

Despite the variations in approach a good degree of commonality of outcome can be seen in the transition paths of the various countries. In economic terms the first effect was a sizeable reduction in output due largely to the disruption of external trade but also to the realignment of consumer demand to different goods and services. In all countries GDP fell sharply in the early years of the 1990s (EBRD, 2009), ranging from around 15-20 per cent in Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic to dramatic falls of 35-50 per cent in the Baltic states (which suffered most from the loss of trade within the former Soviet Union). In the middle 1990s growth resumed in all countries though many, and in particular those which had not determinedly pursued structural reforms, suffered a repeated bout of GDP reductions following the Russian and Asian economic crisis of 1997-8, with the result that, ten years after the ‘changes’ many countries still suffered lower levels of output than they had at the end of the socialist times. However the early years of the new century saw all countries making sustained gains in output.

The growth of the private sector during the 1990s was very considerable. From typically only 10 per cent of GDP in 1990 (though around a quarter in Hungary and Poland, due to private agriculture in the latter case), the private sector increased to account for over three-quarters of production in most countries by the end of the decade. Apart from the laggards of Bulgaria and Romania, which were due in any case quickly to catch up in this respect, the Eastern European countries were typically as much, if not more, private sector orientated than the established member states (EU15) by the time of their accession (Jeffries, 2002).

Public expenditure, naturally, came under great pressure. Quite early in the process (and with the exception of Hungary) public expenditure as a proportion of GDP fell to below the average levels of the EU15 (Ringold, 2005). When combined with the sizeable reductions in GDP that we have already noted, and the fact that under communism many individuals’ benefits and

services derived from their (now defunct) employers, it is no surprise that a number of services began to be run down, chiefly through allowing infrastructure to decay and reducing real wages for employees, in some cases allowing their pay to fall drastically in arrears (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005). With pressure from international donors to adopt prudent fiscal regimes and later from the EU to adhere to the 3 percent deficit limits of the Stability and Growth Pact, the scope to increase public expenditure to allay the dire economic situation, to alleviate growing poverty, still less to renovate the infrastructure for the future, was extremely limited.

A final by-product of economic transition is worth noting at this stage; the arrival and growth of the ‘informal’ economy. By its nature it is difficult to quantify, but the IMF put typical Eastern European levels at around 20 per cent of GDP at around the turn of the century (Camdessus, 2001). The existence of the informal economy had many repercussions, including – for our purposes – a reduction in the tax base from which public services like education are funded, distortion of official statistics on employment and unemployment, through to difficulties for jobseekers and students in citing quite genuine work experience for the purpose of gaining qualifications through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The fall in output that we have noted, and the imposition of hard budgets on the large state enterprises, of course gave rise to a loss of jobs. The question was how fast, and on what terms, this labour would be reallocated to the new sectors. A number of different things occurred:

- in many countries comparatively generous redundancy and early retirement terms were granted to surplus workers in the state enterprises, resulting, in the case of the more elderly workers and often in other cases too, in their withdrawal from the labour market entirely (Boeri, 2000);
- workers taken on in the new sectors or retained in newly competitive state or privatized industries were very much more productive than before. This meant that fewer workers were needed, but that – for those who worked – real wages rose;
- the result was rapidly growing inequality. According to Havrylyshyn and Nsouli (2001) inequality rose at twice the pace that it had done in the UK and the USA during the 1980s. Given the comparatively low levels of wealth and consumption under communism, this meant that the new ‘relative’ poor had very low absolute levels of income – even in the early 2000s five out of the ten Eastern European countries destined

to be new member states had over a third of their population living in absolute poverty as defined by the World Bank (Noelke, 2008).

The reduction in employment associated with the fall in output and increase in productivity manifested itself through lower participation in the labour force, with female participation rates falling from a level of up to 20 per cent higher than the EU average to below western levels in most of the countries (Gebel, 2008); emigration of workers to other EU countries was widespread, even before accession.

Unemployment had been practically unknown during communist times, and there was little infrastructure to deal with it in the form of employment offices or schemes of unemployment benefit (Noelke, 2008). Even recording it was a problem in the early transition years. Table 1 gives unemployment averages for the five years from 1998, when the common *Labour Force Survey* began to give reliable and comparable rates across these countries. As can be seen total unemployment varied considerably over this period. High rates appear to have become entrenched in Bulgaria, the Baltic states, Poland and Slovakia, but in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia unemployment was below the EU15.

**Table 1 – Unemployment Rates 1998-2002 average\***

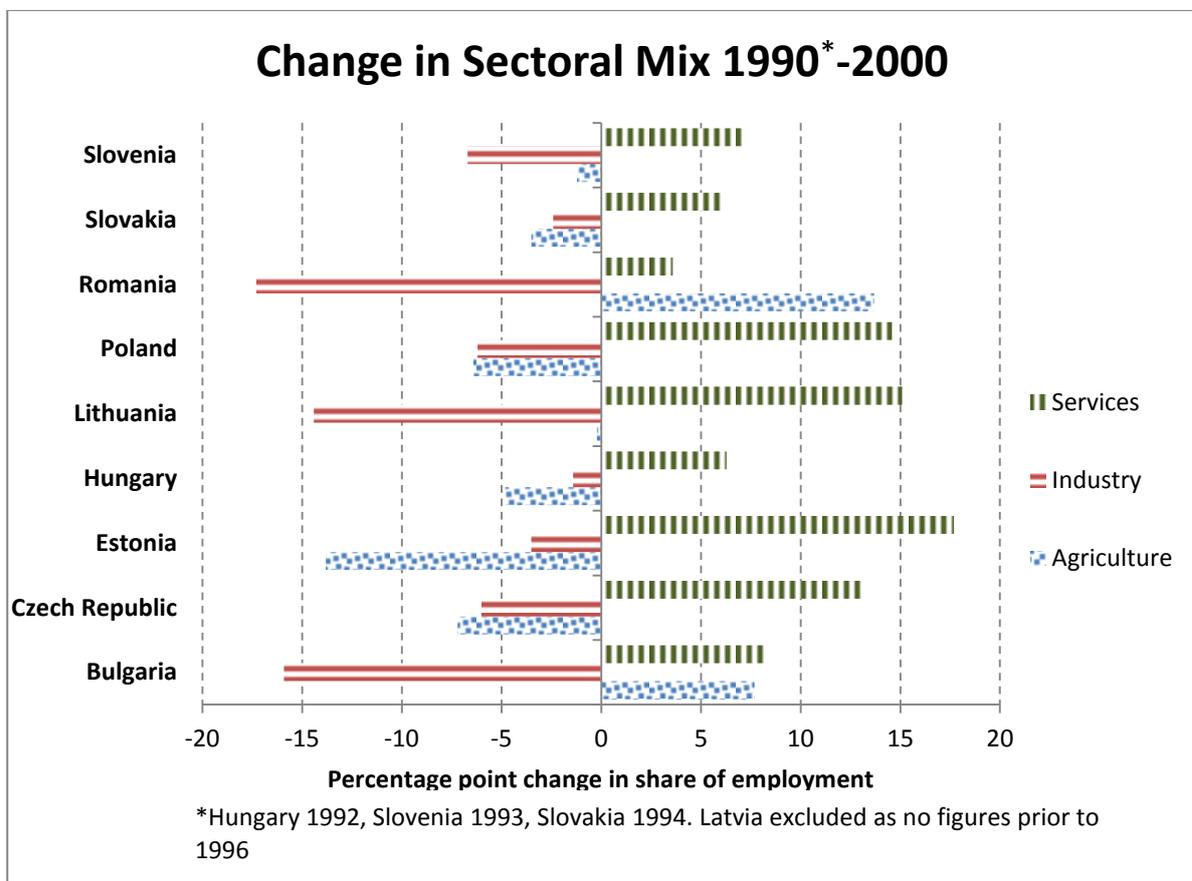
	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Age under 25%</b>	<b>Ratio youth/total unemployment</b>
EU15	8.1	15.6	1.94
Bulgaria	18.0	36.5	2.02
Czech Republic	7.8	16.5	2.12
Estonia	11.2	20.4	1.82
Latvia	13.4	23.3	1.74
Lithuania	14.7	27.2	1.85
Hungary	6.6	12.8	1.93
Poland	15.6	33.9	2.18
Romania	7.5	20.6	2.76
Slovenia	6.8	17.2	2.54
Slovakia	17.2	34.5	2.01

\*Bulgaria 2000-2002

The incidence of youth unemployment on the other hand was higher than the EU15 everywhere except for Hungary, with exceptionally high levels in Bulgaria, the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. As can be seen from the final column young people in most of the countries were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as workers generally in the majority of the countries.

During the process of reallocation of labour a sizeable sectoral shift also took place. Each of the countries saw a decline in industrial employment and a rise in services, often from a low base. Most countries also saw a decline in agricultural employment, though in Romania in Bulgaria the agriculture sector was boosted by displaced industrial workers reverting to the land and subsistence agriculture.

**Figure 1: Change in Sectoral Mix 1990\* -2000**



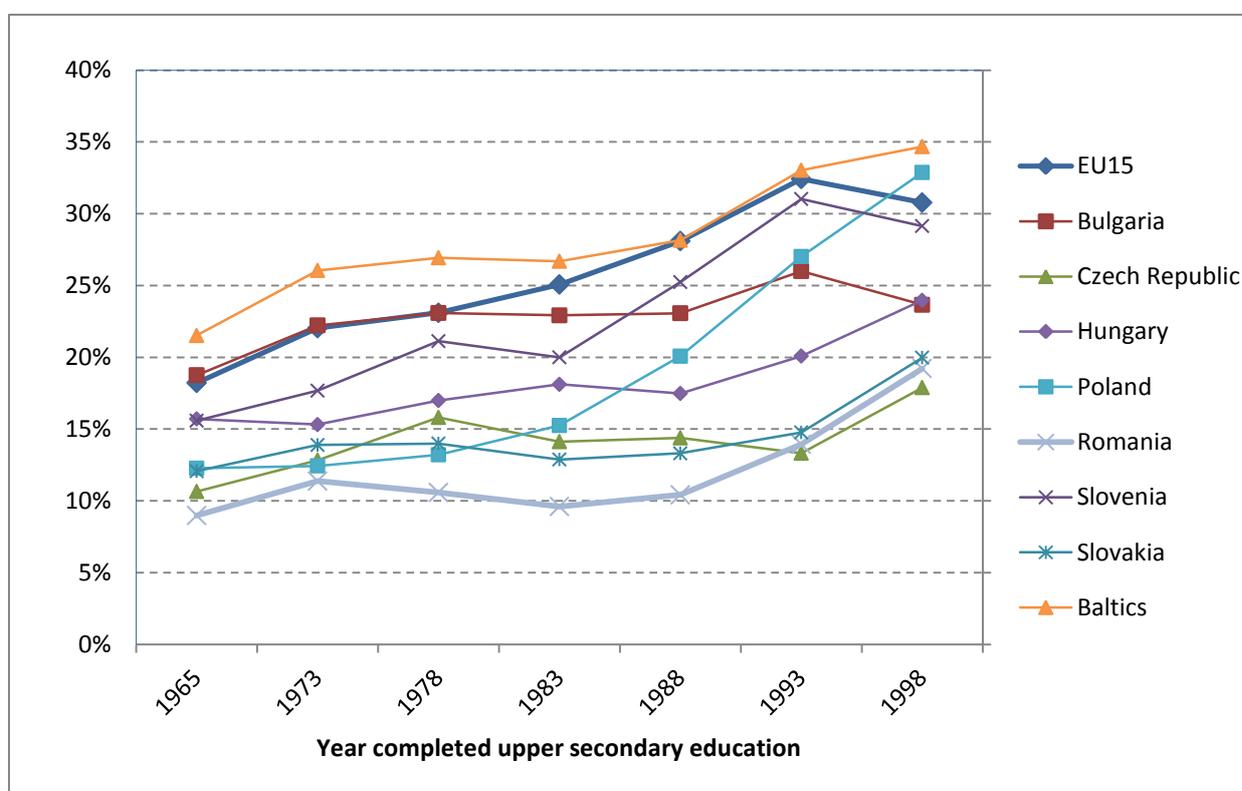
### *Transition in Education*

We charted earlier the relatively few education changes which occurred, as a deliberate act of policy, after the fall of communism. The 1990s and early 2000s saw more widespread changes –

for the most part taking place, not as a result of deliberate policies, but rather in response to the wider social, and particularly economic, changes that we have just discussed.

The most dramatic early educational change came in higher education. In contrast to the position of upper secondary education where participation under communism had been high in comparison with Western Europe, after an initial spurt of growth in the 1960s higher education had not been encouraged, but rather restricted to elites and to the known needs of the economy (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005). During the 1990s in all countries higher education began to expand, revealing considerable pent up demand, as illustrated in Figure 2.\* As well as expanding, higher education diversified with the emergence of a significant private sector in many countries and the growth of shorter vocationally orientated courses within the tertiary sector (Kogan, 2008). Within higher education the previous preponderance of technologically orientated courses reduced and service-orientated courses such as business and law have seen the greatest increases.

**Figure 2: Proportion of different generations with higher education**



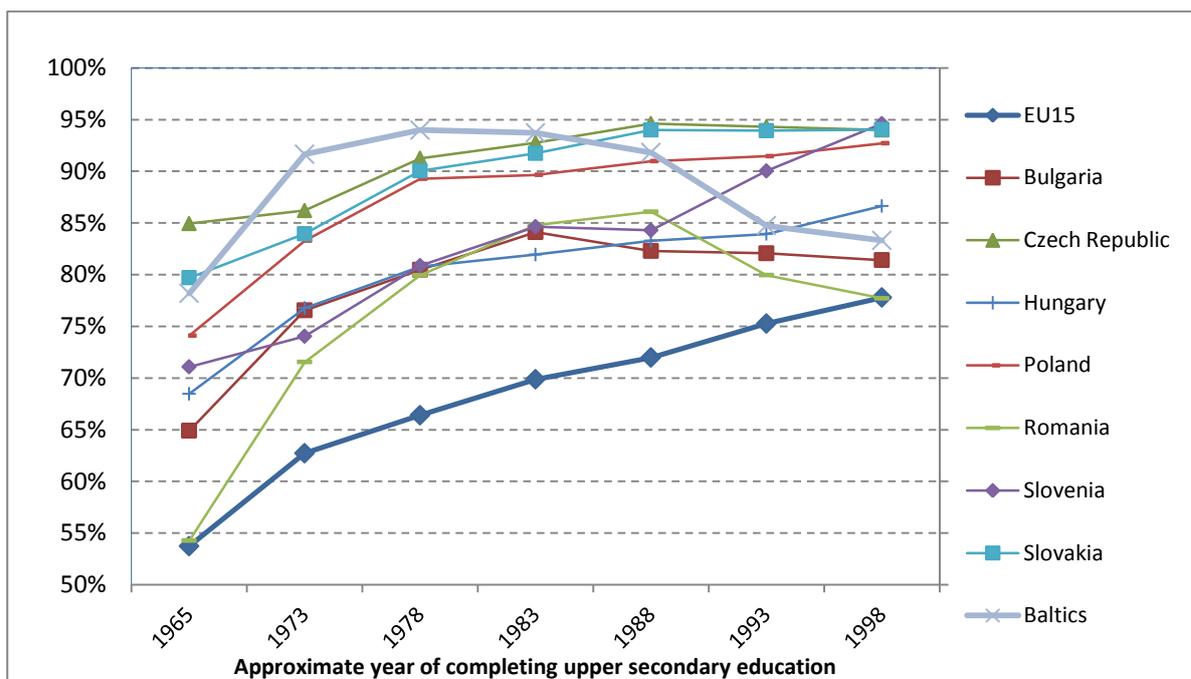
Source: Eurostat (2009)

\* Due to difficulties in establishing figures on participation in various stages of education which are comparable both over time and between countries, Figure 2 and Figure 3 use the highest levels of schooling reported by various age groups in the 2007 *Labour Force Survey*. These age groups are then assigned the approximate year when they would typically have completed secondary education. Thus those who in 2007 were aged 55-64 had a median age of 60 which would have equated to 18 in 1965, which is one of the points shown in the figures.

Whether it was a cause of higher education growth or not, it seems that shortly after the beginning of transition the labour market began to reward those that held university-level qualifications with a considerable wage premium which Ringold (2005, p. 47) reports as having doubled as early as 1993; indeed this was one of the main causes of the increased inequality we have noted. It is no surprise, therefore that the appetite for higher education continued to increase during the transition period, even though state-sponsored places were restricted for budgetary reasons.

How did transition affected participation and attainment at the secondary level? Figure 3 shows the proportion of the population of different ages saying that they have achieved at least upper secondary education. One can see the trajectory of an improving upper secondary participation rate under communism through the 1970s and 1980s, with levels considerably higher than those in the EU15. Transition, however, seems at least to have halted the rise in many countries (with the notable exception of Slovenia), and the Baltic states Romania and Bulgaria saw some decline.

**Figure 3: Proportion of different generations having upper secondary education or more**



Source: Eurostat (2009)

Despite the high participation rates under communism, there is doubt about the quality of education inherited from the socialist era. Merταugh and Hanshek (2005) detail scores from PISA 2000 which were generally lower than the OECD average and comment that these

instruments test problem-solving (rather than memorized or mechanical learning) more than previous tests in which the ex-communist countries fared comparatively well. Boeri reminds us that:

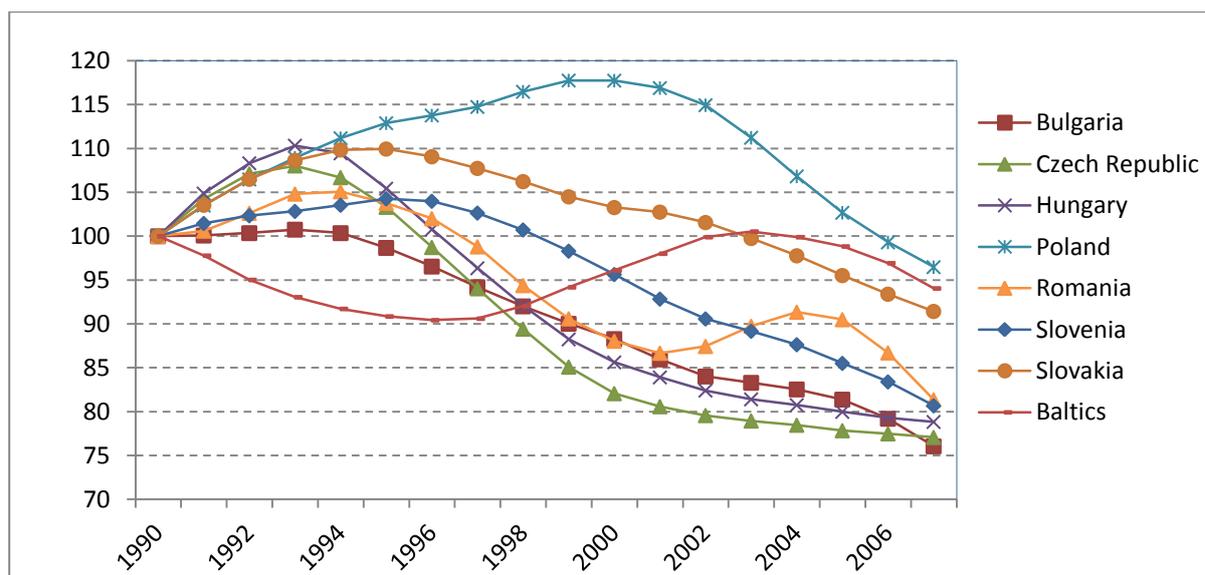
The fact of having a relatively high number of workers with educational attainments above elementary schooling was mainly a by-product of the presence in these countries of 'lower vocational' schools offering generally one or two years of training in narrowly defined occupations up to the completion of compulsory schooling ...(2000, p. 57)

When one adds the considerations that, during transition, budgetary problems meant that teachers salaries were in many cases frozen, and the fabric of school buildings and equipment was allowed to deteriorate (Mertaugh and Hanshek, 2005), then questions about the underlying quality of education, let alone its appropriateness for the new circumstances, started coming to the fore.

As with secondary education some commentators have raised questions about the quality of higher education, particularly in the new private sector which in many countries was unregulated, at least initially. These doubts about quality have, we may note, not stanching the flow of candidates for higher education, many of whom have to bear some or all of the associated costs.

Before we leave the broader field of education and focus on vocational education, it is worth noting the fall in school-age population in many countries. Figure 4 shows the trends in the population aged 15-20. Though some countries experienced an increase in the early years of transition, and Poland had a large and sustained increase through the 1990s, by 2005 all countries faced sizeable declines and Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic had cohorts some 20-25 per cent lower than in 1990. This raises obvious issues of viability for specialized vocational options, especially in the rural areas where these declines are most dramatic.

**Figure 4: Population of upper secondary age (15-20) - 1990=100**



Source: Eurostat (2009)

### ***Vocational Education and Training***

From the discussion so far, we can readily discern some of the transition pressures that began to affect vocational education and training, even though this – even less than education generally – was not an original candidate for reform. Indeed, as we have seen, VET was a source of pride during the communist era which invested considerably in bringing technological know-how to the masses and which set great store by a disciplined work-ethic.

First, there was something of a threat to initial VET (IVET) in competition with general education. Both because general upper secondary education had been suppressed in communist times and because upper secondary general education was the ‘royal road’ to university, there was a tendency for general education to expand at the expense of vocational.

Though it is difficult to compare the figures from country to country, Table 2, derived from the ETF’s 1999 *Key Indicators* publication (ETF, 1999) and from Eurostat (2009) shows reported changes in the proportion of ISCED 3 (upper secondary and equivalent) devoted to vocational as opposed to general education in 1993 and 2007. Latvia and Poland appear to have seen a dramatic drop in the proportion of students taking vocational options (in the case of Poland this has been largely since 2001), and Lithuania and Slovenia saw substantial reductions too. In other cases the reductions, though present, seem relatively modest.

**Table 2: Students at ISCED Level 3 Vocational as Proportion of all Students at ISCED 3**

	1993	2007	Change
Bulgaria	59	53	- 6
Czech Republic	82	75	-7
Estonia	28	31	-3
Lithuania	39	26	-12
Latvia	60	34	-26
Poland	71	44	-27
Romania	69	65	-4
Slovenia	78	65	-13
Slovakia	81	73	-8

For Poland: source - Eurostat 2009, Table educ\_ipart\_s and ETF, 1999 Graph 2.6, p.16. Figures for Hungary have been excluded as they are clearly not comparable over the time period.

However there were also marked shifts *within* initial vocational education. We have already noted the decline in vocational education for younger pupils. In parallel, and often associated with this, was a shift towards vocational options involving ‘double qualifications’ – a professional qualification coupled with the *Matura* or equivalent which gave access to the ever more popular and expanding higher education. This shift was aided by the technical schools which we noted earlier had developed as a feature of communist education. Courses in these schools were longer in duration and broader in curriculum than the strictly vocational options, and lent themselves to meshing in with higher education where they did not do so already:

Technical education attracts more students, but has also become more general while ‘vocational’ education is shrinking and has a low status. In all countries the share of VET courses leading to achievement of higher level certificates is growing, and the courses with broader profiles are preferred. (Nielsen, 2004, p. 43)

In many countries these technical schools were considered to be on an “equal footing with general secondary schools” (Kogan, 2008, p. 18), and in ordinary parlance are sometimes not referred to as vocational at all.

As well as encountering competition from general education and appearing as a dead end in comparison with the technical route, initial vocational education also suffered other problems which were caused by the transition process.

The first, evidently, was a growing mismatch between the sectors in which programmes were offered, and the restructured economy. Even if it had been apparent what these new industries were, it was not easy to undertake the considerable re-equipment and re-training/replacement of staff which would be needed to achieve a better match. The fact that so many young people seemed to be unemployed whatever vocational option they had taken, was demoralizing for any who wanted to bring about a significant shift in the sectoral mix.

Moreover with the demise of the large state enterprises, the link between employer and vocational school had very frequently been broken:

In the beginning of the privatisation and restructuring processes in CEE countries, which had had their vocation systems organised in the dual system\* prior to the fall of socialism, employers largely withdrew from the provision of training opportunities as they were not able to maintain the training infrastructure or afford the financing of apprentices. This led to general disarray in the education and training system, and the dismantling of well-established links between schools and enterprises. (Kogan, 2008, p. 21)

So there was a challenge for the lower-level vocational schools not only to find jobs for their students after they left, but also to provide them with anything approaching up-to-date and realistic work practice while on their programmes.

As a result of these difficulties, commentators began to refer to initial vocational education as outdated and as a reason for the high levels of youth unemployment that we have noted:

... many young people are confronted with a lack of demand for their newly gained professional education as a consequence of unsatisfactory reforms to the national education systems, which lag considerably behind labour market needs and lead to skill mismatches and employers' complaints of low quality of education. (Cazes and Nesprova, 2003, p. 11).

Boeri (2000) put together a raft of evidence, including declining job chances and low wage premiums for vocational students, coupled with the new-found enthusiasm amongst the public

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\* The reference the previous 'dual system' and apprentices refers to the fact that under communism students spent considerable time doing practical work in large enterprises, rather than to a system of apprenticeship contracts with different employers but shared facilities for off-the-job training. In most central and eastern countries the previous system was more akin to French '*alternance*' than to German apprenticeship.

for general education to reach a verdict which was a challenge to the entire structure of initial VET:

The best indicator of the fact that the previous system had over-invested in [vocational] ... training comes ... from the changes which occurred in enrolment rates at secondary education institutes... Just as human capital theory would have predicted there has been a veritable boom of enrolments for general secondary and a strong decline of inflows into vocational education. (p. 61)

This challenge was reinforced by a World Bank study (2006) which argued against any specific vocational training during secondary education. While not denying the problem of 'mismatch' and inappropriateness of much vocational education, Gebel (2008) points out that youth unemployment might be a symptom of a wider insider/outsider problem in the labour market, with established workers being retained in jobs due to high costs of redundancy and employers preferring people with work records, while young people from vocational studies are left waiting in a queue for jobs regardless of their level of skill.

If IVET was in difficulty, continuing vocational education and training for adults (CVT) was simply at a very low level in many countries. Though in socialist times the enterprises had been responsible for training their workers, the slowness of technological change and the stability of product markets had meant that there was actually little need for workers to adapt their skills (Boeri, 2000). The system of adult education or 'people's/workers universities' commended by Grant seems to have fallen into disrepute towards the end of the communist era:

... upgrading in the wage system was made dependent on achieving higher formal levels of education and training and/or the achievement of particular certificates. Participating in adult education became almost entirely focused on achieving (or buying) certificates rather than on improving knowledge and skills. (Nielsen, 2004, p. 44)

Little trace of the former adult education system seems to have survived the transition, and evidently in-firm training, inasmuch as it existed, disappeared with the firms themselves. While in some countries the new or re-structured firms had managed to (re)establish training by the time of *Eurostat's* 1999 Continuing Vocational Training Survey, in a number of other countries in-firm training was at very low levels, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Proportion of firms undertaking any type of training: 1999 %**

Czech Republic	69
Estonia	63
Latvia	63
Slovenia	48
Lithuania	43
Poland	39
Hungary	37
Bulgaria	28
Romania	11
European Union (15 countries)	62

Source: Eurostat (2009), Table trng\_ent03n

Four years later, at the time of Eurostat's ad-hoc module on lifelong learning, conducted as part of the regular *Labour Force Survey* most of the adults in CEECs were still experiencing far lower levels of adult learning than their counterparts in the West:

**Table 4: Adults 25-64 reporting any learning activities, 2003**

Slovenia	82.1%
Slovakia	59.5%
Latvia	46.2%
Estonia	31.4%
Poland	30.0%
Czech Republic	28.7%
Lithuania	27.8%
Bulgaria	16.1%
Hungary	11.7%
Romania	10.0%
CEE	25.6%
EU 15	43.9%

Source: Eurostat (2009), Table trng\_any1

Finally we should note that high and persistent levels of unemployment in a number of countries raised the question of re-training; something which the communist era had not had to deal with at all. There was little or no infrastructure for providing this, in terms of counselling, financing,

training institutions dedicated to adults or recognized programmes, beyond the traditional vocational school courses which were theoretically open to, but hardly suitable for, displaced adults.

During the 1990s a considerable array of re-training courses had grown up in response to this problem, but in the main they were not organized on a national basis. In some cases vocational schools offered accelerated (but still quite lengthy) versions of their programmes for young people, but more frequently the vacuum was filled by private and voluntary providers, financed on a private basis or through donor aid programmes, forming a loose sector which was “highly fragmented” and including “institutions of highly variable quality” (European Training Foundation, 2003, p. 124). Consolidating, financing and even recognizing this new sector would present a considerable challenge.

### **Accession to the European Union**

The EU’s Strasbourg Summit of December 1989 took place only weeks after the fall of Berlin Wall (and three weeks before the fall of Ceauşescu in Romania); nevertheless it was prompt in offering an immediate welcome to the ‘changes’; more than this it determined some concrete and positive assistance to those leaving the Soviet bloc, including (European Council, 1989):

- confirming trade agreements with Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary, and decisions to participate in a ‘stabilization fund’ for the latter two;
- setting up a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to “to assist the transition towards a more market-orientated economy and to speed up the necessary structural adjustments” (p.13);
- in the field of education and training “to allow nationals of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to take part in a number of educational and training programs similar to Community programs”, and for “ the setting-up of a European vocational training foundation” (p.13).

However the prospect of incorporation of these states into the Union was not referred to in the communiqué and – for some considerable time – the position was that the EU would seek “... closer and more substantive relations based upon an intensification of political dialogue and increased cooperation in all areas”. This formula allowed for aid programmes and various types of association.

Accordingly a programme of aid known under its acronym *Phare*<sup>\*</sup> was immediately established. A regulation for the establishment of a European Training Foundation (ETF) was also quickly passed and – with some delays – the organization became operational in 1994. As well as designing and commissioning aid projects, the ETF was to “provide assistance in the definition of training needs and priorities” and to “disseminate information and encourage exchanges of experience, through publications, meetings, and other appropriate means” (Council of the European Communities, 1990, pp. 6-7).

While there was no obvious invitation, the ex-communist countries soon began openly to express the aspiration to join the EU (Nugent, 2004), not simply for economic reasons; ‘Back to Europe’, with all its various connotations, became a recognized refrain:

... entrance to the EU is also going back to the Europe of the very brief inter-war period, to a democratic and independent past... For CEECs, Europe is not so much a project, but rather a sweet memory, a reality once lost and now regained. (Strietska-Ilina, 2007b, pp. 52-3).

By 1993, and after many internal debates, the EU determined to show a more purposeful response to the aspirations of the Eastern countries. The price of non-response was by that time being illustrated in the wars within the former Yugoslavia. At the Copenhagen European Council of June 1993 it was “agreed that the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union” (European Council, 1993, p. 13). It went on to spell out, for the first time, the conditions of membership:

...that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;

the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.

...the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

These *Copenhagen Criteria* also specified that “the Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration” (p. 13).

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<sup>\*</sup> Standing for *Pologne Hongrie Aide à la Reconstruction Économique*. Despite being progressively expanded to include more Eastern European countries, it retained its more restrictive title.

So, as well as complying with the inherited body of European law, the aspiring members would need to show that they had made an enduring transition to democracy in the Western sense; similarly that their economies had changed to a market basis and their industries could compete with those in the West. Further than these, the countries should be on the path to economic and monetary union – a condition that did not apply at the time to some of the existing members.\*

During the course of 1995 and early 1996 all ten eastern countries formally applied for membership. At the same time the Commission was considering in detail how to handle the negotiating process and what the implications would be for “absorption”, including the future division of the structural funds (Nugent, 2004). This resulted in a major piece of work, *Agenda 2000* (European Commission, 1997), which formed the basis for the opening of negotiations approved first in respect of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, with individual negotiations starting in March 1998; and later by in respect of Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, with individual negotiations starting in February.

By 2000 it was apparent that a ‘mass’ integration of Eastern Europe might be possible. In June 2001 the Gothenburg summit confirmed May 2004 as the target date for the accession of the majority of countries (including also Malta and Cyprus), and 2007 for Romania and Bulgaria. This timetable was adhered to, with referenda in the various countries confirming the matter.

Beyond the enlargement to ‘27’, certain countries in the West Balkans still have applications in the pipeline. Following the completion of negotiations, and the necessary domestic referendum Croatia is due to join in July 2013, and recognized ‘candidate’ countries include FYR Macedonia and Serbia (European Commission, 2013).

So, by 2007, there was a set of different instruments whereby the EU could influence the development of vocational education and training (and many other policy areas) in the candidate countries:

- the accession negotiations and associated pressures to conform with existing EU policies;
- the *Phare* aid programme;

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\*Two years later a further condition was introduced. This was that the countries should demonstrably have the capacity and institutions to implement the *acquis*. This gave the Commission, which was responsible for negotiating and monitoring the accession process, the licence to evaluate the internal administration of aspiring members.

- the other activities, particularly by the European Training Foundation, in identifying issues, fostering co-operation with relevant EU countries and involving the aspiring countries in established EU networks relevant to VET.

### *Accession negotiations*

*Agenda 2000* was a major development. It looked forward to the development of the Community policies (in areas such as agriculture, employment and external affairs) in the light of enlargement. It made an assessment of the challenges to meet the *Copenhagen* criteria, in each of the candidate countries. It recommended a format and style for negotiations. And it assessed the impact on EU budgets, recommending a new financing framework for the period 2000-6 which took account of the demands of the likely new members.

The *acquis* was a very substantial body of law amounting to 80,000 pages in all (Nugent, 2004, p. 47). To make matters manageable in negotiations it was divided into a series of 29 ‘Chapters’. Chapters were ‘opened’ for negotiation at certain points in the overall process and ‘closed’ when the Commission considered that a satisfactory outcome had been reached. Chapter 13 covered Social Policy and Employment; Chapter 18 concerned Education and Training.

Chapter 13 was substantial, incorporating a large span of accumulated Treaty obligations and specific Directives on such matters as collective redundancies, the handling of workers’ acquired rights on company take-overs, equal treatment of the sexes, anti-discrimination, health and safety and measures to give social protection to unemployed and sick workers. Interestingly, and significantly, it not only included specific requirements but also items of the so-called ‘soft *acquis*’, namely participation in the EU Employment Strategy which had started in 1997 using the ‘open method of co-ordination’ under which member states voluntarily co-operated in setting goals concerning employment and reporting on progress against them on a regular basis:

The candidate countries shall work in co-operation with the EU on the follow up of the Employment Policy Review. The candidate countries are invited to address the following issues: (i) whether the functioning of the labour market is improving so as to ensure that labour supply can be effectively matched with demand for labour on the domestic market and what policy measures are being developed to support this process; (ii) whether policy reforms and labour market transformations are progressing sufficiently rapidly and deeply to permit a full participation in the Single Market; (iii) the policies and measures are being pursued to prepare the large share of the working age population which is unskilled or inappropriately skilled for a market economy; (iv) the degree of readiness of the employment policy structures and the employment policy delivery systems to implement the Employment Strategy. (DG Enlargement, 2004, p. 46)

A similar injunction concerned ‘social dialogue’ whereby employers and trade unions were to be involved in decision-making:

The candidate countries are ... invited to confirm that social dialogue is accorded the importance required and that the social partners are sufficiently developed in order to discharge their responsibilities at EU and national level, ... the development not only of tripartite structures but also of autonomous, representative bipartite social dialogue is an important aspect for the future involvement of the candidates countries’ social partners in the social dialogue activities developed at European and national level. (p. 46)

Arguably these stipulations went rather further than the obligations of existing Member States, strictly interpreted.

Chapter 18, dealing with education and training, was far less burdensome. As the *Guide to Negotiations* noted “Education, training and youth is primarily the competence of the Member States” (DG Enlargement, 2004, p. 60). There was only one relevant Directive (dealing with free education for the children of workers from other Member States). The other requirement was that countries should be in a position to participate in the Education and Training programmes run by the Commission. Given that they were already doing this, there were not expected to be any significant problems.

Given the unproblematic nature of Chapter 18, it is not surprising that negotiations were marked as ‘provisionally closed’ a few months after they were formally opened (by October 1998 in the case of the first batch of applicants, and by May 2000 for the second batch). Chapter 13, though, took longer, with negotiations typically lasting a year to eighteen months before ‘provisional’ closure, though less than six months in the cases of Romania and Slovakia (DG Enlargement, 2004, p. 48).

Formal agreement was one thing; the Commission however continued to monitor compliance through a series of annual progress reports on each country spanning the years 1998-2003 (2005 for Bulgaria and Romania). These reports were not confined to the strict *acquis*, but commented more widely on progress within each country, including the development of skills.

In parallel with these progress reports the candidate countries were participating in the Employment Strategy, which involved its own set of targets and assessments of progress. Following the *Lisbon* summit of 2000, this ‘open method of co-ordination’ was extended to cover lifelong learning.

An analysis\* of ‘regular reports’ made by the Commission, insofar as they touch on VET, shows that the Commission used the opportunity to comment quite widely on aspects of VET policy, even though for the most part they did not feature in the *acquis*. There was a consistent indication of the direction in which countries’ VET practices should develop, which did not differ much between the various countries. The main thrust of the Commission’s attempts to steer VET policy were:

- naturally to ensure that countries complied with the two explicit points of the *acquis* – following a Directive whereby countries needed to recognize each other’s qualifications which were required for access to labour market positions, and participation in the various education programmes operated by the Commission;
- preparing countries to participate in the European Employment Strategy, both by adopting certain policies, such as active labour market measures, and by adopting the methodology of the ‘open method of co-ordination’ involving a cycle of planning, making public commitments and opening the countries’ policies and practices to external scrutiny;
- there was also a presumption that a new legislative base of some kind was an essential precursor to effective action. Allied to this was a preference for decentralization to the regions, involvement of ‘social partners’, and agencies at an arm’s length relationship to central ministries. In short there is something of a distrust of political governance and a bias towards more technocratic elements;

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\* conducted as part of my PhD research. The full set of ‘regular reports’ can be found at [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/key\\_documents/reports\\_1998\\_en.htm#report](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/key_documents/reports_1998_en.htm#report).

- the need to relate VET more closely to the labour market was much stressed, but rather than employ market mechanisms to achieve this, the emphasis was on the involvement of employers and unions in the governance of VET together with the scientific calibration of formal training or occupational standards to the needs of employment;
- reform of initial VET was regarded as important, but with little indication as to what such reform might comprise, beyond a perception that the VET programmes on offer were out of step with the actual opportunities of the (new) labour market, and that ‘updating’ would rectify this; although high levels of participation in secondary VET were often commended, problems with ‘quality’ were increasingly referred to;
- problems with adult training were frequently highlighted. The need to develop a sector of adult VET provision, which had been absent in communist times, was often repeated in the reports. This was very much allied to the issue of re-training workers displaced through economic transition, and – more specifically – to active labour market measures for the unemployed;
- a focus on qualifications as an important element not only in modernization, but also in achieving transparency and improving quality. A more formal system of qualifications would make achievement more visible in the new market economies, particularly if it could recognize achievement outside the traditional initial VET system. Objective assessments to standards which were explicitly linked to employers’ needs could improve quality by decreasing reliance on dubious, outdated curricula determined by what communist-era schools could provide.

These reports were taken seriously, even if they strayed from the strict legal requirements, as an ETF official involved with the accession negotiations explained: \*

“... there is a tendency to take the message as a prescription. More than something voluntary ... So ‘if you want to accede, you have to ... have a national qualifications framework’. In the [existing] member states it’s just a recommendation for countries.”

### *Aid*

A separate strand of EU influence came through the *Phare* programme of aid. From the start this had incorporated projects to assist the reformation of VET. It is not possible to give a precise figure on VET expenditure under *Phare* for the entire period, but the Commission’s

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\* This and subsequent excerpts, are from interviews conducted during my PhD research.

Annual Report for the programme of 2000 contains a breakdown showing €1,100m having been spent on “Education, Training and Research” from the inception of the programme, or some 14 per cent of the total (DG Enlargement, 2001, p. 118). Given that finance for research in the accession countries was not likely to have been large, and that primary and general education were generally in scope to other donors such as the World Bank, it seems reasonable to suppose that something approaching an average of €100m per annum was spent on aid to VET across the ten countries.

In the early days of *Phare* it had been ‘demand driven’, with proposals for projects coming from the countries themselves, moderated by the DG Enlargement and aided by the ETF; the ETF was closely involved in setting up and managing the projects. However from around 1997 the programme became ‘accession driven’; this meant that project proposals should emanate from agreed action plans negotiated as part of the accession process and reflecting items which had been identified as important to secure a smooth transition to EU norms. Increasingly, also, the programme was seen as a pre-cursor to the country’s participation in the EU Structural Funds once it had joined the EU (from the point of view of VET, this would mean the European Social Fund). So as well as the content of projects, the EU took a keen interest in bringing the country’s administration to a position where it could sensibly manage and account for VET projects funded by the EU in the future (DG Enlargement, 2002). At around the same time the ETF stepped back from managing the projects and instead adopted an advisory role.

As *Phare* became increasingly institutionalized a standard mode of operation emerged:

- at the highest level needs across all the relevant sectors were identified in ‘Accession Partnerships’ incorporating both a ‘National Programme for the Adoption of the *Acquis* and a ‘National Development Programme’ for “promoting economic and social cohesion in the candidate countries” (DG Enlargement, 2002, p. 10);
- from this a series of ‘project fiches’ were derived, spelling out the aims of individual projects and the resources agreed in respect of each<sup>\*</sup>;
- in turn, from these fiches, individual ‘terms of reference’ were drawn up giving a detailed specification of what was desired from each project. These were made available

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<sup>\*</sup> At the time of writing a comprehensive archive of these programming documents for each country was available at [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/former-assistance/phare/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/former-assistance/phare/index_en.htm)

to a short list of organizations which had expressed an interest in tendering for a given project, and which the Commission had judged competent to make a realistic bid;

- finally a tendering process took place, in which bidders outlined how they envisaged tackling the terms of reference, the personnel they proposed to deploy, and the price they would charge. The chosen contractor was then responsible for delivering the project, subject to various monitoring procedures involving both the Commission and officials from the country concerned, typically arranged as a Steering Group.

In the case of VET, these procedures gave rise to a fairly limited group of specialist tendering organizations<sup>\*</sup>, which developed mechanisms for writing proposals promptly and for assembling at short notice teams of ‘experts’ who matched the fairly detailed specifications for ‘key personnel’ set out in the various terms of reference. Virtually all terms of reference demanded that a number of these experts be foreign, with a view to importing relevant practices from existing member states. These personnel were typically complemented by ‘local experts’ from the country concerned (though not employed in official departments or agencies), who could help the foreigners navigate the internal system, as well as providing technical expertise of their own.

As a counterpart to the ‘technical assistance’ team, countries were typically expected to set up a ‘Programme Implementation (or Management) Unit’ (PIU or PMU). This could be a single official designated to liaise with the project, or a group of officials within a ministry or agency. In a number of cases, for example in Romania, the PIU evolved into a semi-autonomous unit within government concerned with VET development.

During the course of the 1990s a discernible pattern evolved in *Phare* VET projects as summarized by the ETF (2001) in a review which drew on a number of individual evaluation reports:

- drawing up new ‘modernized’ curricula for vocational subjects; there were a number of dimensions to this, involving the elaboration of programmes for ‘new’ subjects such as informatics, and expected growth areas such as tourism. These reformed curricula also attempted to be broader in scope than the previous, highly specialized, versions;

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<sup>\*</sup> organizations in the UK included, for example, IMC Consulting (formerly involved in restructuring in British coalfields, and now part of White, Young Green), Cambridge Education, the British Council and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

- beyond this, incorporating new ideas in curriculum design, including outcome-based or occupational standards, and “competency-based assessment and certification” (p. 12), and the inclusion of “key skills”, and in many cases adopting a modular approach to curriculum design;
- training of school managers in strategic planning (school development plans etc.), budgeting, personnel management, management of change, networking and marketing;
- training of teachers, not only in the new curricula, but also more generally in topics such as occupational mapping and functional analysis, standards, the modular curriculum approach, new (less didactic) teaching methods, student assessment and key skills (p.17);
- upgrading of equipment (this usually consumed at least a third of the project budget);
- study visits to counterparts in established EU projects, sometimes with the aim of developing longer lasting partnerships;
- stimulating and supporting national policy development through “White Papers” typically advocating decentralized management and tri-partite decision-making; integrating initial and continuing training; “shifting quality control over provision from input (curriculum contents, staff requirements) to output criteria (qualification standards)”; introducing new pathways and levels of training particularly between secondary and higher education (p. 24).

However, these innovations were fragile, and could not necessarily be counted on to take root in the wider system. In the first place, as the ETF review makes clear, all the early projects adopted an approach of concentrating reform and innovation in a limited number of ‘pilot schools’, which although much energized by their selection “were allowed ... to operate on an ‘experimental basis’ without any major commitment by policy makers to use results and integrate them into mainstream developments” (p. 29). Moreover the sheer scale of rolling out complex curriculum development and teacher training across the whole system was often too daunting for the country concerned to contemplate (Smith, 2001). In the second place, the production of ‘concept papers’ and White Papers by no means guaranteed that systemic reform at the policy level would be followed through into legislation, or even accepted at all by national policy-makers and legislatures.

While this basic package of reforms could still be recognized in the later stages of *Phare*, which frequently sought to extend the range of schools involved in the original pilots, VET projects also became more varied, including (European Training Foundation, 2003):

- mounting targeted re-training programmes for the unemployed, in response to countries' increasing participation in the EU Employment Strategy;
- stressing a regional dimension to VET and/or targeting disadvantaged groups, particularly the Roma minority, mirroring the approach of the EU Structural Funds;
- efforts to consolidate, systematically, the newly emerged adult training sector, through the development of national agencies for this sector, accreditation schemes and associated legislation;
- more generally developing national VET strategy and policy, for example in developing national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms, reflecting the EU's growing emphasis on these instruments as part of its *Copenhagen* process for VET (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and European Commission, 2002).

It is an interesting question where the 'model' of intervention in terms of a package of curriculum reform based on explicit employment-related outcome statements, involvement of social partners in determining standards, modular structures, qualifications for adult training *etc.* came from. One interviewee, who had worked in DG Enlargement in the early days of *Phare*, put the origins down to the predilections and personal experiences of two individuals (from education ministries in Denmark and the Netherlands) who "split the countries between them", in preparing the first VET projects. Another ETF official described the pull of two systems in particular:

"... we had at that time two big models trying really to be developed in the countries. The Anglo-Saxon approach and also the German approach. Because countries they were very [conscious of] the big success of Germany – the influence of Germany was very strong. So the Dual System was really a reference for many countries and [the Germans] were pushing very much ... And at the same time the other model which was also very prominent was the NVQ system developed in the UK and which was maybe supported very much by many consultants [working on *Phare* projects]."

He went on to explain that the introduction of 'Dual System' apprenticeships proved very difficult in countries which did not have this tradition, and where private enterprises were only just beginning to appear on the scene. He expressed surprise that, though the VET system in

many of the Eastern European countries had much in common with, and probably was originally influenced by, the French school-based system, “I haven’t seen any French consultant in that period in the field of VET – never, never. The consultants came from the UK, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany, and that’s it.”

Some of the countries had difficulty in shaping the assistance to their own policy agenda in the early days, as a Romanian policy-maker explained:

“I’m not very sure that Romania was ... in a position to have *a* vision about the position of VET. So it was, let’s say, driven from outside rather than from inside; we were not in the position of having a shared vision ... to start the negotiation. We were very much inspired from abroad.”

This uncertainty in the administrations of transition countries was echoed by an ETF official:

“One of the big puzzles for me is how it has been possible to continue for so long in many countries and have so relatively weak capacity in the Ministries to actually define projects.”

While some countries eagerly embraced the ‘Western’ package of reforms, or at least accepted them as they had no real agenda of their own, in others such as Serbia it sparked a battle between reformers and traditionalists:

“...the Institute for the Development of Education, they didn’t have any communication with CARDS [the equivalent of *Phare* in the Western Balkans]. They made a big restriction on the people employed in the Institute [from] cooperating with CARDS Because they didn’t accept this ... new approach... they were scared that this new curriculum orientation would change the traditional position of the teachers of some subjects or some disciplines” [Serbian Ministry of Education official, who subsequently worked in projects]

Aid programmes could cause a measure of confusion:

“...at a certain stage you had the *Phare* programme...as a pilot, 20 VET schools perhaps. And then you had the Ministry’s own reform initiative with another group actually funded by the British Council. So in many countries you had separate in parallel running reform initiatives.” [ETF official]

Nevertheless the projects could give rise to a network of ‘modernizers’ who – as in Lithuania – would rise through the system, aware of practice abroad, and act as champions of alternative approaches.

### ***Co-operation within the EU***

As well as pressure during the accession negotiations and aid through *Phare*, the Eastern European countries were subject to more subtle influence through being invited, before

accession, to participate in networks and working groups on an increasingly frequent basis, organized by the ETF and the already existing European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). They became fully involved in the various groups set up to take forward the initiatives agreed in the *Copenhagen* process, carrying these involvements on after their accession as full EU members.

‘National Observatories’ had been established in each country with assistance from the ETF in the mid-1990s. These centres were research-orientated and served to provide relevant statistics and cross-country comparisons of VET to inform, and challenge, policy-making. The ETF involved staff from these institutions in its country reviews, and indeed some went on to occupy positions in national policy-making and in the *Phare* projects. As time developed some of the Observatories accreted other functions such as acting as centres for Cedefop’s *Refernet* system of facilitating information exchange between countries.

Finally we should recall the participation, from an early stage, of the Eastern European countries in the Commission’s education programmes. This meant that during the 1990s and up to accession many thousands of, students, teachers, managers of VET institutions and policy-makers had the opportunity to visit VET establishments in EU member states and to receive visitors themselves. Ideas of what might be possible (and no doubt what might be impossible or undesirable) were generated through these exchanges and joint working on projects, as well as the ‘study visit’ component of many *Phare* programmes. For the individuals concerned, some of whom occupied, or went on to occupy, influential positions within their own countries, such experiences were surely much more vivid in terms of influence than the many weighty reports full of recommendations and injunctions which they received from official sources:

“... Serbia was closed for eight years. But now it is open there is the possibility to share what happened in this eight years – what is new, what isn't new, and how to get into step with Europe, and other countries. And many things happened in 2001-2 organized by the Ministry, many visits, many people travelled to Europe in different countries learning about experience, especially in the VET area...” (Serbian project worker)

## **Conclusion**

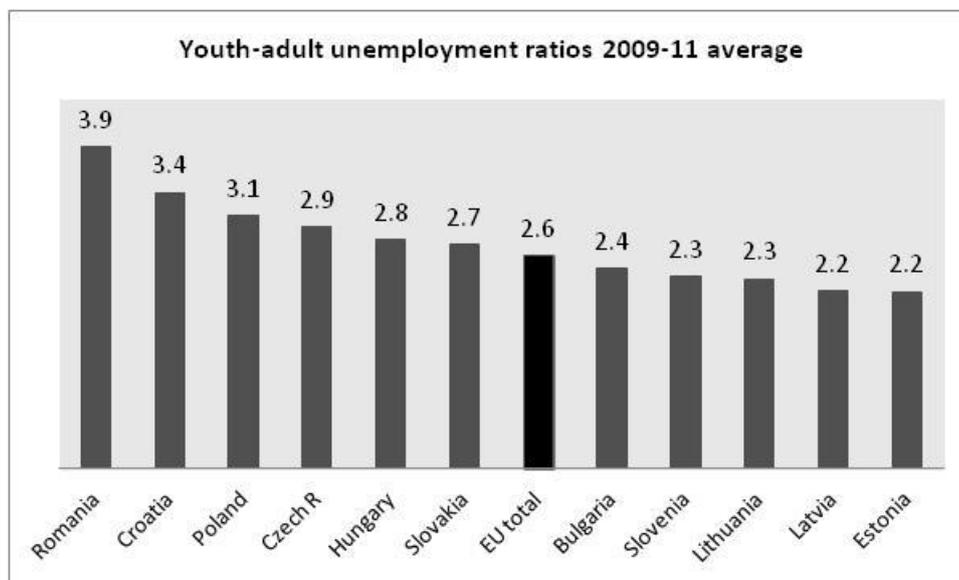
We can conclude in two ways: first by briefly sketching where the Eastern European countries are now in terms of the development of their VET system, and secondly what this trajectory tells us about the processes of change in the ‘post-socialist’ environment.

### *The VET systems today*

This is not the place to describe the systems of every country. Rather we shall broadly sketch the main features which apply in common to the Eastern European countries, or which are shared by a number of them.\*

As we have seen initial VET (for young people as part of the school system) was under pressure, both from rising aspirations for access to higher education, and from the perceived lack of success of IVET in achieving job outcomes for its graduates. The latter problem has certainly not gone away. Figure 5 shows the ratio of youth-adult unemployment in the Eastern countries compared with the average for the EU.

**Figure 5: Youth Unemployment**



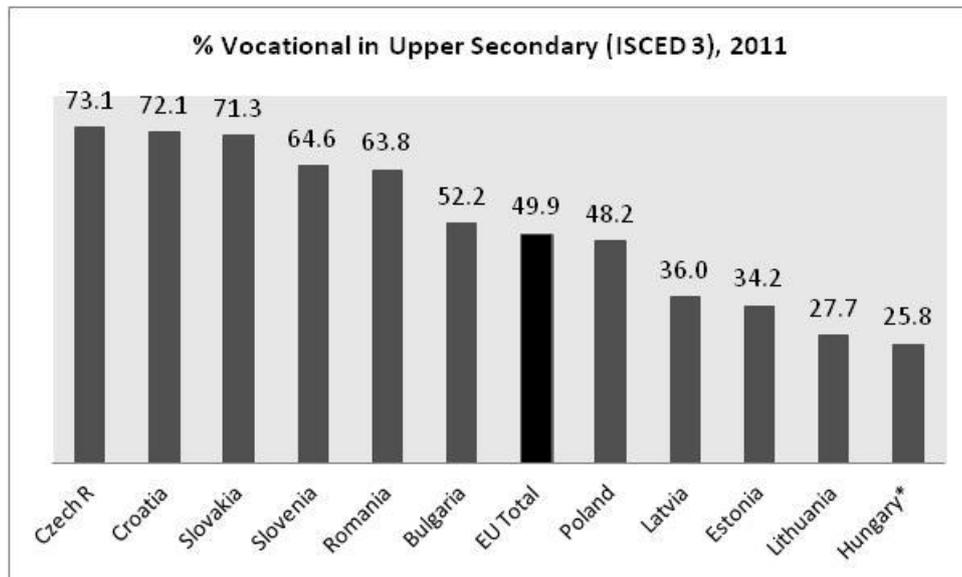
Source: Eurostat Table: Unemployment rate, annual average, by sex and age groups (%) [une\_rt\_a]

The Eastern countries appear to straddle the EU average, but bearing in mind that this average includes the Mediterranean countries which have experienced very high rates of youth unemployment, it is plain that initial VET in a number of our countries is still open to the charge that it does not prepare young people for the labour market. Moreover the three Baltic countries that have low youth-adult rates actually experienced very high absolute rates of youth unemployment (and indeed unemployment generally): with Latvia having a youth rate of 35% over the three years, Lithuania (32%) and Estonia (28%).

\* Unless otherwise stated information in this section comes from the 'country reports' drawn up for CEDEFOP at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/information-services/vet-in-europe-country-reports.aspx>

The ‘slide’ in VET that took place in many countries in the immediate years after accession would seem to have lessened and even stabilized. The result is a wide spread in the proportion of upper secondary education devoted to VET as opposed to general education as shown in Figure 6:

**Figure 6: VET in Upper Secondary Education\***



Source: Eurostat Table: Participation/ Enrolment in education by sex [educ\_ipart\_s]

Though in a number of countries, policymakers initially took a relaxed attitude to the evident appetite of many parents and young people for the previously restricted general education track (and in Poland for a time actively encouraged it), the last decade has seen efforts to revive or protect initial VET. A number of strategies have been employed, including:

- building on the technical schools established in the communist era (see page 16 above). This model, generally of 4 years duration (3 years in Estonia, which has 9 rather than the more typical 8 years of basic education) has taken slightly different forms in different countries, sometimes retaining a distinct institutional identity (*cf.* the Polish *Technikum*), and at others taking the form of a programme which can be taught in all vocational schools (*cf.* Serbian and Croatian ‘4 year’ programmes). Slovakia shows the power of this ‘brand’; a need for school rationalization gave rise to the merger of the technical ‘specialized schools’ (*SOŠ*) with the vocational schools (*SOU*) in the form of ‘joined’

\* There are some problems in classification in this table. In particular Hungary shows a very low proportion, due – it would seem – to the classification of the Secondary Vocational Education Schools (in which students also take the general education secondary school leaving certificate) as general rather than vocational. If one includes these as vocational the Hungarian percentage rises to over 60 per cent (Hungarian Central Statistical Office: [http://www.ksh.hu/stadat/annual\\_2\\_6](http://www.ksh.hu/stadat/annual_2_6))

schools (*SŠ*); before long, however, the merged institutions were all re-christened as *SOŠ*. Estonia stands somewhat apart in having rather more ‘blended’ forms, with options for students to take greater or lesser amounts of vocational education alongside their general education; Poland, too, has ‘profiled’ general secondary forms, with a small vocational tilt;

- linked to this is the opportunity for vocational students to acquire the ‘full’ secondary leaving certificate which gives access to higher education. Again this takes different forms; in some countries (*cf.* Serbia, Slovenia) there are distinctive forms of ‘Vocational Matura’ with assessed subjects varying with the vocational domain. In other cases (*cf.* Romania, Latvia) there is a fairly narrow general education component which gives access to higher education, sitting alongside vocational assessments which give rise to a distinctive vocational qualification. Usually the general component is studied alongside the vocational subject matter, but in Estonia vocational students need to do an additional year focussing on general studies if they want access to higher education. Of course, giving the opportunity to take these ‘full’ secondary certificates does not mean that all vocational students on relevant courses will pass – in Bulgaria where the vast majority of vocational students are on these programmes, pass rates are poor according to the OECD (2004);
- efforts to upgrade more basic vocational training, previously taken often for only two years after basic schooling, to programmes of at least three years, supported by curriculum modernization, teacher training and better equipment often funded through *Phare* or the ESF. Many countries have established dedicated VET units/agencies, within or attached to Ministries of Education, sometimes combined with responsibilities for adult education (*cf.* Hungary, Serbia, Croatia), or devoted solely to IVET (*cf.* Romania, Slovenia). Some have developed ‘bridging’ forms of full upper secondary VET to allow graduates of the more basic vocational training to progress into the technical stream and to get access to higher education (*cf.* Romania and Latvia have two year ‘add-ons’ after their 3-year basic vocational programmes for this purpose).

The expansion of general education and the dilution of previously dedicated vocational education to the technical variant which typically has broader vocational domains and a richer mixture of theoretical and general subject matter has meant that students from these tracks who are not progressing to higher education have no very specific vocational skill with which to enter the labour market. This has frequently given rise to the expansion of ‘post-secondary, non-

tertiary' (ISCED 4) programmes taken immediately after secondary education. Hungary is a good example; its 4 year 'technical' stream (*szakközépiskola*) has now become largely 'pre-vocational' and students of it who do not go on to higher education (as well as some from the general upper secondary track) specialize vocationally, often at the same institution, for a further 1-2 years, depending on the field of study and whether or not they undertook cognate studies in their secondary phase. Romania's 'Post High Schools' (*postliceale*) are somewhat similar. Again this built on a model already apparent in communist times (see page 15 above).

The loss of large enterprises linked to schools, particularly to the lower vocational (typically 3 year) stream, has meant that obtaining practical work for students has become a challenge, and one which is still present after 20 years. A natural response was to increase theoretical and general elements in the curriculum, which at least had the advantage of creating jobs for teachers, or to expanding in-school practical workshops. However both responses were both expensive and risked irrelevance to the new labour market. So drives to promote real work experience have been a feature in many countries. This is often referred to as 'apprenticeship', but is probably more correctly described as 'alternance', since in most cases there is not a contract of apprenticeship between an employer and an individual student. Poland seems to be the only country with a sizeable and distinct apprenticeship sector, accounting for something like 15 per cent of IVET students\*. Smaller 'revived' apprenticeship arrangements are present in Latvia, Slovenia and Croatia, organized through craft chambers, and half of the (comparatively low number of) Hungarian basic vocational school students have individual contracts with employers for their work experience. A number of countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Romania) have recently introduced regulations to recognize apprenticeship as an educational form, but take-up so far seems very limited. Despite these attempts to secure employer involvement in one way or another, a lot of practical work in the region is still undertaken in (often poorly equipped) school workshops.

As part of the modernization programme many countries have undertaken curriculum reform. This has not only involved up-dating vocational curricula to reflect changes in the industrial and commercial world, and introducing entirely new syllabuses (typically in IT, mechatronics, and business services), but also re-casting the way vocational curricula are developed in two respects:

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\*Confusingly one of the main active labour market measures in Poland is also referred to as apprenticeship though it is of shorter duration and is not recognized as an educational programme (OECD, 2009)

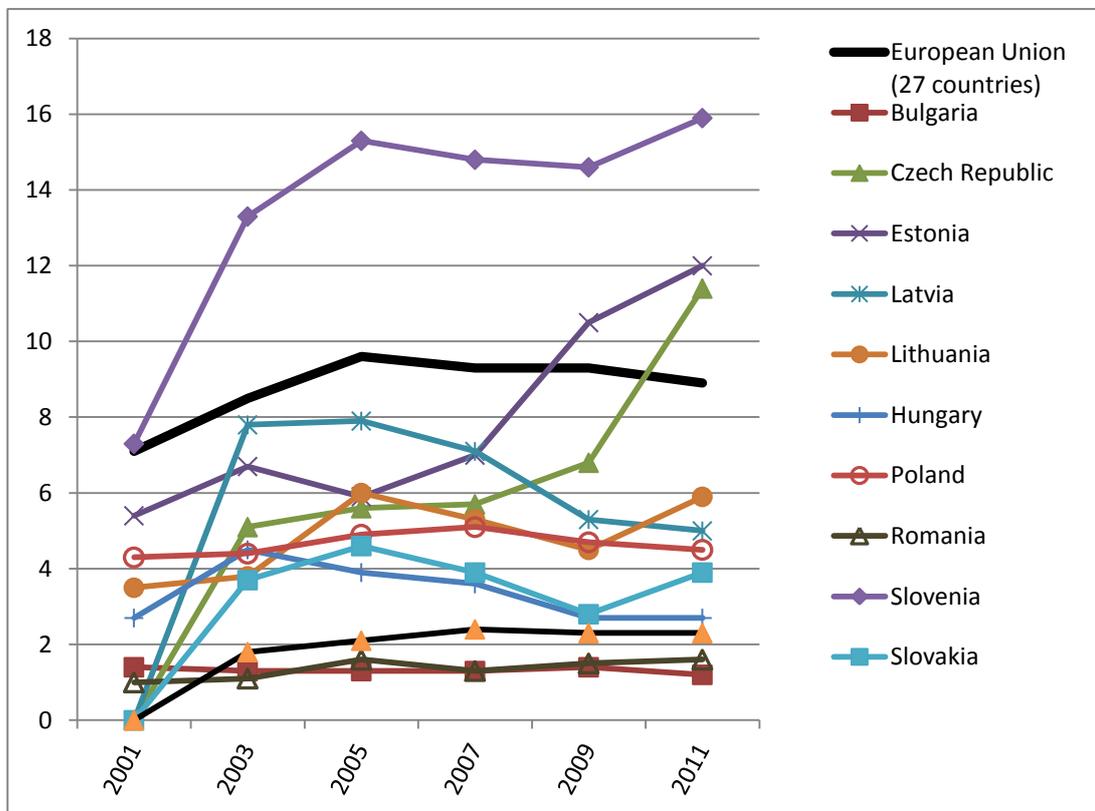
- first, the involvement of ‘social partners’ on a sectoral basis in developing and sometimes endorsing curricula. In some cases this is confined to their involvement on working parties or expert committees which develop vocational profiles (*cf.* Latvia, Bulgaria), but is increasingly on an institutional basis. Romania has over 20 sector committees with legal powers to approve relevant profiles. In the craft sector Hungary recognizes chambers as having jurisdiction over their trades. Slovakia assigns profiles to relevant Sectoral VET Councils for an overview. Estonia’s ‘Professional Councils’ devise vocational standards for relevant profiles. Both Croatia and Serbia are establishing advisory councils on a sectoral basis;
- second the formulation of curricula in terms of learning outcomes. Most countries have gone down this route, spurred by the promotion of outcomes under the European Qualifications Framework, and sometimes building on earlier work undertaken in pilot *Phare* projects. In adult qualifications and curricula this outcomes-based approach is practically universal, and it seems increasingly common in IVET too. However this does not mean that the more traditional syllabus-based approach (specification of teaching inputs) has disappeared. In most countries, for IVET, groups of practitioners (sometimes involving employers and unions) develop curricula ‘based on’ previously stipulated learning outcomes. In the case of Lithuania, where vocational curricula were devolved to schools early in the transition period, they are now expected to build these around new, national, ‘professional standards’. Occupational standards (the formulation of competences needed at work in different occupations) are a particular form, being found in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania, and Slovenia, though not in all sectors. Slovakia had planned a major exercise in developing occupational standards in the 1990s, but cancelled it because of concerns about sustainability. An extract from the Slovak country report hints at the conceptual difficulties that these changes generated:

Traditionally, the description of “educational goals” was essential for curricular documents. These goals were based on the identification of respective knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits. Nevertheless, despite this, content based programming dominated within curriculum design. A “competence-based” paradigm become dominant in the early 2000s mixing up with a traditional approach, gradually complicated with a European ‘learning outcomes discourse’. (p 82)

In the same vein modular curricula are present in a number of cases (Estonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and envisaged in new reforms in Latvia and Lithuania) though again more prevalent in adult training.

As we have seen, adult training presented major challenges during the transition era, and the situation is still problematic in many countries. Taken overall adult education and training is at comparatively low levels in most of the countries, though as Figure 7 shows, Slovenia, and more recently Estonia and the Czech Republic, have now exceeded the EU average.

**Figure 7: Percentage of people 25-64 reporting education/training in previous 4 weeks**

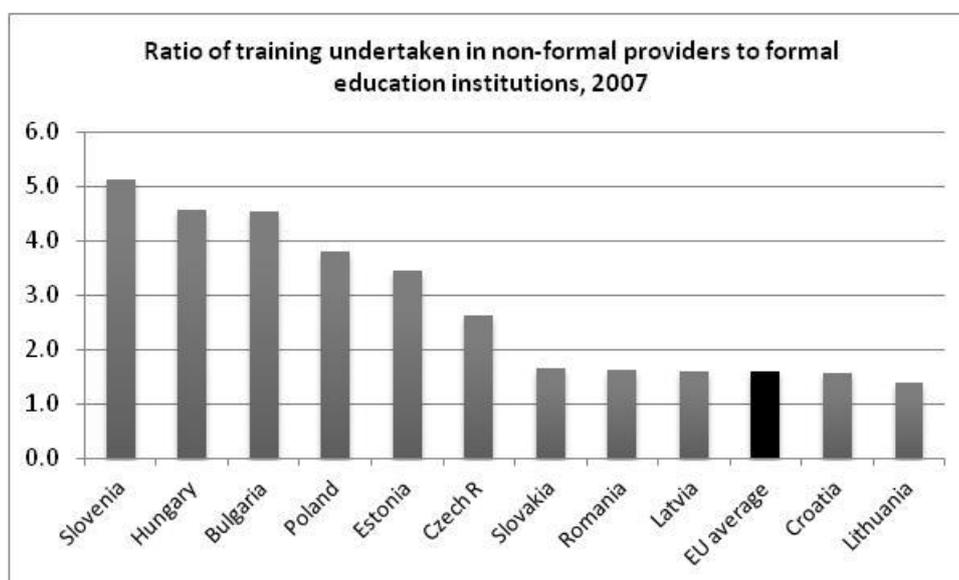


Source: Eurostat (2013)

Most of the countries take the view that employer training is a private matter, though there are a number of tax incentives *etc.* Hungary has a longstanding ‘training levy’ on employers, from which training costs can be deducted subject to certain limits. But the new and somewhat unruly sector of adult training which quickly emerged after the fall of communism is still in the process of being institutionalized in many countries.

Figure 8 shows the ratio of adult education and training taken in formal education institutions on the one hand, and non-formal dedicated training providers on the other. There are of course other venues, notably employers, NGOs, *etc.*, but the figure shows that in Eastern Europe (with the exception of two countries) this non-formal sector tends to be more important than is typically the case in the EU, in many cases very much more important.

**Figure 8: Adult training providers**



Source: Eurostat Table trng\_aes\_170-Distribution of non-formal education and training activities by provider (2011)

This is quite a remarkable outcome for countries where this sector, let alone private operators within it, was previously unknown. The countries have had to determine whether to leave this ‘non-formal’ sector alone, whether to restrict it and/or promote the role of the formal sector, whether to permit or indeed encourage certification on the part of non-formal providers, and whether to take steps for its quality control. These are a complex set of issues and countries have navigated them differently. Most countries have active labour market measures involving adult training which is commissioned and paid for by their employment services; in these cases the minimum position is that the employment service exercises some quality control over the providers it funds. Though in all countries adults can – in principle – gain ‘mainstream’ (*i.e.* IVET) qualifications by attending vocational schools (very often with some reduction in the required duration) a number have set up what amounts to a parallel system of certification covering the short courses typically provided in the non-formal sector. Confusingly the formal sector can also offer these certificates for short-course offerings they make, though they continue also to offer the ‘mainstream’ programmes and qualifications for adults in the same occupational fields. Countries which have developed a ‘register’ of adult qualifications include the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia (where they are interestingly referred to as NVQs, at least in translation). With its modular, competence-based, system of IVET qualifications, Estonia appears to be able to unify its vocational qualifications for adults and young people, an aspiration to which many other countries subscribe, and which is reflected in the plans for

comprehensive national qualifications frameworks which many of the countries are engaged in, but none seem so far to have achieved.

Other countries have not gone so far down the road of accreditation of providers and developing qualifications for adults. Croatia, Bulgaria and Lithuania allow providers to propose programmes (sometimes with material drawn from formal programmes) which are approved centrally, allowing participants to gain a certificate which is in some sense publicly recognized. Poland and the Czech Republic have systems of voluntary accreditation, though take-up seems low, other than for providers used by the Employment Service.

### ***'Post-socialist' transition***

What can we say, to conclude, about the influences and processes which we have noted at various points? While acknowledging, as we did at the beginning that to attempt to tell a common story is far from asserting that the countries are the same, or even that they have all reacted similarly, we can attempt to draw together some common trends.

First, it must be remarked that in some senses the VET scene has not changed as much as we might have imagined. In many parts of the region young people today are attending the same institutions, studying similar syllabuses in similarly named vocational domains as in communist times. Though they are not doing their practical work in the giant enterprises of the past, all too often they are still undertaking it with antiquated equipment with a slow pace of work. Though their curricula may now be stated in terms of learning outcomes, the reality in many countries is still a series of technical subjects interspersed with practical workshops sessions. Adult training is either given in the firm or – as an emergency – when a worker is forced to leave a job; the latter circumstance, though, is much more common these days than under communism. Of course this picture is not unknown in much of western and southern Europe too. But the simple point is that – despite the transitions and influences of the past twenty years – past patterns are a powerful explanation of what we see today.

At the same time it is undeniable that things have changed in the field of VET. Which of the various influences that we postulated at the outset (page 6) have been significant?

Despite much rhetoric, at the time of the revolutions, of restoring a pre-communist past, it is hard to see that this has been a powerful influence in VET. Of course some patterns apparent in

communist times were themselves continuations of previous systems and traditions, notably the divisions between lower and upper secondary education and the school-based vocational model which was prevalent in many of the countries before the Second World War. But early moves to bring back six-year grammar schools, which affected many countries, do not seem to have taken root to any very large extent. Again there has been limited success in re-introducing apprenticeships, which has been confined to a small scale, except in Poland, and appears not to have grown outside the craft sector. More obvious than the restoration of the past has been the explicit rejection of some communist features: ideology obviously, but also the more general ethos of ‘polytechnical’ education (see page 11) and the more extreme versions of comprehensive education.

There have been notable changes in institutions. Most obviously the disappearance of the parallel Party apparatus, but beyond this, the focussing of VET in ministries of education (and in the case of adult training, frequently ministries of labour) rather than ministries concerned with the various sectors of the economy. Founding education in general, and VET in particular, on specific codes of law was a considerable enterprise in the 1990s and early 2000s. The emergence of quasi-autonomous agencies, especially for the employment services, but also in the case of VET, has been a feature, as has the decentralization of governance (and to some extent financing) to regions or counties. Schools, too, have gained some increased degree of independence in the form of more budgetary discretion, and some increased autonomy over the curriculum. Moreover the involvement of ‘social partners’ at national and – less often – local and school level has been widespread. However there must be questions about how much real change these institutional factors have brought about in themselves. In the first place many of them seem to have been adopted as a result of EU influence, or at least encouragement, resulting in perhaps a less than whole-hearted reception, or the superimposition of these innovations on more deep-seated ways of going about business. There are many comments about the slow-moving nature of bureaucracy despite the apparently untrammelled agencies, and about the uncertainty of social partners and their domination by government officials. And as we have seen decentralization has not always been accompanied by delegated finance; despite some curriculum freedom, in most countries curricula for initial VET are still largely constructed at the national level with few opportunities for divergence at school level.

If institutional change was a by-product of other forces, and of uncertain influence, then there can be little doubt that the process of economic and social transition had a profound effect. This

is even more striking as it took some time for the participants to realize that VET was to be in the firing line of these changes – the initial assumption was that strong VET systems would be a resource for coping with change rather than one of its victims. The effects took a number of forms. First, and most obviously, industrial change cut one of the pillars of any VET system – the relation with firms – which arguably has even now not been fully restored. As a by-product it raised unemployment levels, particularly amongst youth, which raised in many peoples' minds whether, in the new world, VET was performing its function of preparing young people for work. This opened the door for reform of initial VET and a preparedness to experiment with new curricula and forms of organization – leaving fertile ground for influence from abroad. Second, and reinforcing the first trend, was the expansion of higher education; unlike under communism, personal educational improvement was now seen as a passport to a better life, and universities were the apogee of this aspiration. This meant that a much higher level of general education was necessary in secondary education, manifested in the 'full' secondary education certificate which was needed for entry into higher education. In turn this gave a very marked fillip to the longer, technical, courses which in this way survived communism and flourished across the region after its demise. Finally economic transition displaced many adult workers, who were no longer able to be re-deployed and re-trained within the paternalistic state enterprises, giving rise to demand in an entirely new adult training sector, which is still taking shape in many countries.

Lastly, there is the influence from abroad. As we have already described the countries were very often especially open to foreign influence, as they had little affection for their previous system (which was manifestly failing under the forces of transition), and because they had a predilection for developments which could be seen as going 'back to Europe'. More important still, were the organized foreign influences resulting from accession to the EU. These influences took the form of both 'stick' (the conditionality which accompanied the accession negotiations) and 'carrot' (in the form of aid programmes modelled on foreign practice and including foreign experts). There must be questions about the efficacy of the aid programmes, many aspects of which appeared not to take root, including apprenticeship in many places and curriculum reform which had a rather puzzled reception (though there are indications that this latter is now being revisited in a number of countries). However the *acquis*, and particularly the 'soft *acquis*' of the European Employment Strategy and the Lisbon Agenda would seem to have had a significant influence: for example in institutionalizing active labour market measures, in stimulating reforms in initial VET as part of more general economic and human resource planning, and in encouraging

governments to build frameworks for lifelong learning.\* This latter strand has been taken forward under the *Copenhagen* process of co-operative development of VET centring on qualifications development and quality assurance, projects in which the Eastern European countries, if anything, often seem more enthusiastic participants than their western peers (Kuhn and Sultana, 2006).

The past can still be seen in the VET arrangements of the Eastern European countries, as can the effects of transition and accession. However, now these traits seem less distinctive, and the problems and successes of VET in these countries seem now not qualitatively, or even perhaps significantly quantitatively, different from those in other parts of Europe. In that sense it seems fair to say that VET in Eastern Europe has rejoined the mainstream of Europe – and this, after all, is a trajectory which most in those countries wanted across all the various domains of their national life.

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\* This finding, of the greater influence of conditionality over aid, aligns with Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's (2005a) more general conclusion covering all areas of accession negotiations.

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For more information, please contact  
[llakescentre@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:llakescentre@ioe.ac.uk)  
LLAKES Centre  
Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way  
WC1H 0AL  
London  
UK



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Southampton**  
School of Education

