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No 5

The social dialogue on education and training in the Copenhagen process

Study on the social partner's work perspectives
and perceptions to contribute to enhanced
European cooperation in VET and LLL



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Preface

The European Union (EU), its Member States and social partners ⁽¹⁾ are committed to making Europe's education and training systems the best in the world. This requires VET to respond to rapid changes in labour markets, demography and technology. VET must be integral to systems of lifelong learning, to enable people to adapt and develop their skills continuously. To achieve this, the EU began to develop systematic policy priorities and common European tools in following the Lisbon Council in 2000.

To follow up Lisbon, the Education and training 2010 work programme was established to develop high quality, efficient and equitable education and training systems. In parallel, specifically to strengthen European cooperation in improving VET policy, the EU, its Member States and social partners launched the Copenhagen process in 2002. Supported by the open method of coordination ⁽²⁾ they review the process every two years and renewed their commitment to modernising VET in the Maastricht (2004) and Helsinki communiqués (2006).

To complement the Copenhagen process, in 2002, the cross industry social partners developed a framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications as a contribution to the Lisbon strategy. It outlined the role, concerns and priorities of social partners in education and training. The social partners presented in 2006 an evaluation report highlighting the achievements of the previous four years and the main trends ⁽³⁾.

Cedefop is the EU's agency supporting European VET policy development. It supports the EU, its Members States and the social partners who are working more closely than ever to modernise VET and create a European working and learning area. Cedefop's strategic objective for 2009-11 ⁽⁴⁾ is to 'contribute to excellence in VET and strengthen European cooperation in developing, implementing and evaluating European VET policy'. This strategic objective is supported by four priorities:

- informing European VET policies;

⁽¹⁾ Business Europe, CEEP, ETUC, UEAPME. Key challenges facing European labour markets - A joint analysis of European social partners, 2007.

⁽²⁾ The Open Method of Coordination -OMC- is contributing to develop joint approaches between countries and supporting integration of education and training issues within socioeconomic Lisbon goals. For further information, please visit:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/the_process_en.htm

⁽³⁾ ETUC et al. Framework of actions on lifelong development of competencies and qualifications: evaluation report (2006)

http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/SocialP/news.asp?idnews=1425

(<http://www.etuc.org/a/2319>)

⁽⁴⁾ Cedefop. Enhancing European cooperation in vocational education through evidence and expertise: continuity, focus and flexibility: Cedefop's medium-term priorities 2009-11

Foreword

Globalisation, demographic change and EU enlargement pose challenges for European economic development and social cohesion. As part of the Lisbon Strategy vocational education and training (VET) policies have a crucial role to play. For VET, the Copenhagen Declaration (EC, 2002) and Maastricht (EC, 2004b) and Helsinki Communiqués (EC, 2006a) – are crucial milestones towards process of modernising education and training underway across Europe as part of the Education and Training programme 2010.

Adoption by the European cross-industry social partners, in 2002, of a framework of action for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications placed lifelong learning in the centre of political debate among social partners. The framework underlined the most important challenges for social dialogue in developing training provision in Europe and the important role of social partners in strengthening European cooperation in VET.

Cedefop carried out research in 2007 to identify how social partners are dealing with the priorities and challenges of the Copenhagen process in VET. A panel of social partners across European, national, sectoral and, to a lesser extent, territorial levels were interviewed. The results provide a new source of information providing fresh insights.

This publication gives an overall understanding of the social dialogue on lifelong learning in 12 Member States. The findings show that social partner involvement in European policies is not a simple top-down process. National education contexts and industrial relations systems often shape the role social partners play and influence their perceptions and concerns about lifelong learning and VET.

The analysis confirms that lifelong learning and VET are priorities for social partners at all levels. The publication sheds light on some converging and/or diverging objectives of both sides of the industry concerning training strategies. It also provides information on negotiations at different levels in the countries selected where social partners are setting up social dialogue and/or collective bargaining on education and training. The sectoral outcomes indicate that social partners are more concerned with the provision of continuing training and the effects of liberalisation, technological and demographic change. Different types of situations have been identified where closer cooperation with sectoral social partners should be established.

I hope this publication will interest social partners, researchers and others.

Aviana Bulgarelli
Director

- interpreting European trends in and challenges for skills, competences and learning
- assessing VET's benefits;
- raising the profile of VET.

These priorities focus Cedefop's activities on supporting VET policy-making by strengthening European cooperation through new knowledge, better understanding and mutual learning. Using its expertise gathered through research, policy analysis and networking, Cedefop monitors and reports on VET policies, helps design and develop common European principles and tools to support policy implementation. It brings new knowledge in skills and competences, stimulates debate and disseminates information through its website, publications, networks, study visits, conferences and seminars.

The study provides an overview of the social dialogue in VET and lifelong learning in Europe, and sets out social partners' concerns about lifelong learning issues.

The findings show that social partners are increasingly involved in steering and governing VET in the Copenhagen process. For instance; promoting wider access to adult learning and equal training opportunities for risk groups; exploring workers' mobility supported by training; identifying future skill needs; mitigating effects of sectoral restructuring; recognising and validating learning outcomes; finding new funding mechanisms; developing occupational standards and/or to promote adequate continuous training. National consultation on a European qualifications framework and a credit system for VET vocational education and training helped create awareness and involved a wider range of actors. In the medium term, social partner involvement in implementing European tools in education and training may have an impact on collective negotiations between stakeholders ⁽⁵⁾.

Social partners needs are both procedural related to the organisation of training policies and are directly related training policies content. Better information would increase their readiness to become more involved in European education and training issues

⁽⁵⁾ See: European Economic and Social Committee OPINION of the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council repealing Council Decision 85/368/EEC on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the Member States of the European Community COM (2007) 680 final – 2007/0234 (COD) (Brussels, 13 February 2008).

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Outline of the publication

The first chapter of the publication provides a background of the research presenting the objectives and the methodology used to collect empirical data. The core of the empirical data comes from semi-structured interviews with nearly 90 trade unions and employer association representatives, in 12 countries and at European level.

The second chapter examines the notion of lifelong learning (LLL), and the origins and developments of the notion in Europe. The chapter then summarises the institutional developments that have led to the Copenhagen Declaration (EC, 2002) and the Helsinki Communiqué (EC, 2006a). Chapter 2 also examines the question of the implementation of these policies in the national contexts, which in turn leads to the question of governance. The last sections of the chapter focus on the role of the social partners.

Chapters 3 to 6 show the analysis of the empirical findings. Chapter 3 proposes the analysis of all interviews conducted in the countries, with no specific comparison between countries or between sectors. It intends to reflect the responses that the empirical data provides to several transversal questions such as: do social partners have an interest for LLL and vocational education and training (VET)? How do they approach these issues? Do trade unions and employer organisations share common interests in this field? Do they negotiate and reach agreements? What needs and requirements do they express?

In Chapter 4, the analysis compares the national situations and examines to what extent the national context plays a role in the social partners' approach to LLL and VET issues.

Chapter 5 examines whether there are sectoral social partners specific trends in the context of LLL. It compares the cross-industry and the sectoral responses, and also compares the situation in the different sectors covered by the study.

Finally, Chapter 6 focuses on developments at European level, in the cross-industry and in the sectoral social dialogue. It looks at the attention European social partners pay to LLL and training issues, in their joint texts but also in their latest work programmes. It also reflects the data collected by interviews with several European players.

The conclusion synthesises the main findings and provides some specific proposals and recommendations to set up a way forward to work in the field of the social dialogue and LLL paying particular attention to support the social partners.

Executive summary

The research project is inspired by a former report of 1997 (Cedefop, Theunissen, 1997), but numerous changes, both in lifelong learning (LLL) and in social dialogue, have taken place since then and should be considered as a research question in European policies on vocational education and training (VET).

The aim of the research is to identify how the social partners are dealing with the priorities related to the Copenhagen-Helsinki process in education and training and to collect data on perceptions, concerns and demands of the social partners address or could address to Cedefop in the light of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Helsinki Communiqué.

In addition, the report aims at updating the mentioned study published, but also to achieve following objectives:

- (a) collecting information to gain better understanding about perceptions, concerns and demands of the social partners when focussing in training provision at different levels;
- (b) obtaining accurate information that could update achievements and developments in LLL and vocational training, on social partners' side;
- (c) provide an overview on the current dynamics of the LLL in the frame of the social dialogue paying particular attention on the situation of the new Member States;
- (d) gaining better understanding of communication and information processes with stakeholders, at both European and national level, to set up more tailored support to social partners organisations in the framework of the Copenhagen process, if possible;

The first chapter of the publication provides a background of the research presenting the objectives and the methodology used to collect empirical data. The first step on the research was based on a rigorous review of secondary sources.

The core of the empirical data comes from semi-structured interviews with nearly 90 trade unions and employer association representatives (cross-industry and sectoral representatives at European and national level), selecting a sample of 12 countries (Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden) and 6 sectors (trade, telecommunications, post and courier, electricity, chemical industry and road transport).

An analysis of the joint texts and work programmes of the European social dialogue completes the empirical material.

The analysis of the data collected in the interviews and in the documentary search highlight the actors' positions and strategies, including their needs and requirements,

taking their specific institutional context into account, be it at European or at national level

Although the research has methodological limitations, the results constitute a nuance and novel source of information due to few large-scale surveys carried out on the issue at European level. Indeed, information collected from interviews provides a solid original material allowing thorough comparative analysis.

In the second chapter, the notion of LLL is to be found in European debates since the 1990s. However, from the 1970s the principle begins to gain importance in the debate on the policies to put in place with regard to education and training. The ideas that come to the fore are then those of lifelong education (education throughout one's life) or permanent education. Attention was mainly directed towards adult education and particularly towards those individuals whose initial schooling might be considered inadequate. The success of this notion does, however, remain fairly limited, as does its application in terms of education policy (Field, 2000a).

In the 1990s, the concept of LLL appears in texts of the European Commission, the OECD, UNESCO or even the G8 (Field, 2000a). But the notion takes on a different meaning. First of all, the vision underlying the concept is no longer such a humanist one, but owes more to the needs of the economy, particularly the link between learning, on the one hand, and the labour market, employment and economic growth on the other. Then, the notion involves the totality of different phases of learning, whereas previously the accent was put on the possibilities of offering a second chance to individuals by focusing on second and third cycle training. Finally, the approach implies that individuals take greater responsibility for their own training (Maroy, 2001).

A definition of LLL becomes established as a reference in the European Commission's *Communication of 2001 on Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*: 'responses to the consultation on the Memorandum called for a broad definition of LLL that is not limited to a purely economic outlook or just to learning for adults. In addition to the emphasis it places on learning from pre-school to post-retirement, LLL should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The consultation also highlighted the objectives of learning, including active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion, as well as employment-related aspects. The principles which underpin LLL and guide its effective implementation emphasise the centrality of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities.' (COM [2001] 678 final: 3-4) (EC, 2001, p. 3-4).

Following the Bruges initiative of the Directors General for vocational training from October 2001, the education Ministers of 31 European countries (Member States, candidate and European Economic Area countries) together with the European social partners and the Commission, adopted on 30 November 2002 the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in VET (EC, 2002). The declaration

gave a mandate to develop concrete actions to improve the effectiveness, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training, to promote development of the European job market and, consequently, to improve the competitiveness of the Member States.

On the 14th December 2004, the Education ministers from 31 countries, the European social partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen their cooperation in terms of education and training (EC, 2004b). The Maastricht Communiqué updated the Copenhagen declaration, reported on progress made since November 2002, and set out new priorities and strategies for the coming two years. According to the Communiqué, the Copenhagen process between 2002 and 2004 had succeeded in raising the visibility of VET at the European level and in the Lisbon strategy. The Communiqué also considered that the different participating countries and stakeholders reached common understanding of the specific challenges concerned and agreed on strategies and on means to implement these objectives.

In its section on implementation and follow up, the Communiqué invited all actors in the field of VET, including social partners, to take their responsibilities and 'to contribute to making effective the implementation of the Copenhagen process at all levels' (EC, 2004b, p. 4-6). It also underlined the Cedefop's and ETF's specific role to support the implementation of the Copenhagen process and to use their networks (ReferNet and national observatories) to report, monitor progress and exchange experience.

After Copenhagen and Maastricht, the ministers in charge of vocational education and training from the Member States, ministers from candidate and European Economic Area countries, together with representatives of the social partners and the European Commission, participated to the Helsinki meeting on 4-5 December 2006. The Helsinki Communiqué outlined the position of vocational education and training in Europe and adopted objectives for the next two-year period. The process was evaluated and its strategies and priorities were reviewed (EC, 2006a). This last Communiqué focused especially on the development of tools and the recognition of competences and qualifications to favour the mobility of the workers throughout Europe.

In 2004, following a conference organised by Cedefop on the subject of lifelong training, a report was published which highlighted certain weaknesses in the implementation of the principles of LLL in the Member States (Cedefop 2004). According to the report, the quality of professional training and education varies greatly between the different States and the social partners are not sufficiently involved in the implementation of these policies.

Indeed the educational systems vary within the EU and the implementation of LLL policies depends, to a great extent, on the national institutional frameworks. While the

principles are common to the Member States, they cannot be translated in the same way into national policies (Verdier 2007).

The institutional differences also explain the different roles of the social partners in the national education and training systems. The corollary of this is that their role in the determination and implementation of LLL policies is likely to differ from one country to another.

Chapter 3 provides a transversal analysis of all the interviews conducted in the countries, with no specific comparison between countries or sectors. A broad definition on the social dialogue on LLL/VET is presented at the beginning of the analysis. The chapter clearly shows that training in general is a thematic that has increasingly become an object in the social partners' agenda, even if they do not explicitly refer to the notion of LLL.

Additionally, trade unions and employer organisations have a large range of common objectives (e.g. need to pay more attention to company and worker adaptability, analyse future skills needs). Nevertheless, there is no consensus in different issues, for instance, on the definition of LLL as such, and the points of view differ on a series of dimensions which lays out a set of divergent objectives (e.g. on workers versus companies responsibility on assuming training needs; cost of training).

The social partners expressed their opinions and concerns related to bargaining on training. In fact, they would be willing to develop more some qualitative aspects of collective bargaining such as training. Nonetheless, in the light of the collected information, some factors have been detected indicating why negotiations on training are not more widespread (e.g. the collective bargaining structure and/or their own capacity and priorities). Following interviewees' responses, it has been mapped on which countries and levels bargaining and/or texts on VET and LLL are available.

As far as European policies are concerned, the national interviewees generally would acknowledge to be more informed on the content of the Copenhagen priorities. This would be even more acknowledged on the new Members States. In fact, it seems that links between the social partners' agenda and the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities, when they exist, result rather from 'convergence without coordination' (Hancké, 2002; Marginson and Sisson, 2004), from common concerns and challenges, than from top-down coordination.

The interviewed social partners expressed a set of needs. In any case, they do not have to correspond to realistic or feasible actions which can be developed by Cedefop and/or others organisations.

More precisely, on the one hand the social partners express several procedural needs that relate to the processes organising training policies. To some extent, they all refer to demands for closer relationships between the European processes and the social partners at all levels:

- (e) in general, the interviewed social partners recommended to continue working on adapting the approach more closely to the national or sectoral realities. They mentioned the cross-national coordination of training policies as a way to strengthen the European dimension in the field of training;
- (f) further, the interviewees expressed the need to continue associating the European social partners in processes at EU level: these could play a role to improve the connections between the European policies and the national and sectoral players;
- (g) the social partners are willing to be more aware on European issues and underlined the importance of simple, clear and up-to-date information, which should be concrete, operational and easy-to-use for practitioners (it should also be, if possible, translated in different languages). In addition, they find that exchange of information and experience should be more developed. This working approach is very useful for them;
- (h) the interviewed social partners would find it very useful to join a proactive action by European institutions, with direct contacts with national and sectoral social partners;
- (i) some of them would increased visibility of LLL and education and training issues all over Europe to heighten awareness;
- (j) some interviewees also mention the need for funding projects led by the social partners.

On the other hand, several needs and requirements formulated by the respondents are of a substantive nature, and directly concern the contents of training policies:

- (a) the social partners would like to work on clarification of the meaning of key concepts. This aspect is in line with activities of the European cross-industry social partners promoting the notion of LLL;
- (b) they express needs for support (exchange of practices) and/or advice in the recognition of qualifications and competences through, for instance, participating in the development of common principles for certification and/or validation of informal learning;
- (c) the majority is confronted with the difficulty to identify and anticipate skills needs, and they are would be willing to support and participate in this field of work;
- (d) the worker mobility induces difficulties for the social partners to cope with, in particular in some countries (e.g. Spain, Romania), and the social partners are interested in support to approach this issue and identify the challenges that it raises for their domestic labour market and in terms of skills and competencies.

All these needs expressed by respondents do necessarily correspond to realistic or feasible actions to be developed by European institutions or other bodies. But they could be treated as a matter of discussion among and within social partners' organisations at different levels.

However, the points of view expressed in the interviews generally indicate a necessity to adapt the approach to the different national institutional and industrial relations contexts, supported by information and/or actions that are relevant on the daily practice of the social partners. In any case, European institutions can play a supportive role providing a platform for discussing such aspects.

In Chapter 4, the analysis compares the national situations and examines to what extent the national context plays a role in the social partners' approach to LLL and vocational education.

If the data show a widespread interest for training across all countries, the role of social partner organisations differs from one country to another, according to the specific organisation of the education system and to the respective industrial relations system. Regarding the awareness of the social partners about the Copenhagen-Helsinki process, and the perceived relationships between the European processes and the domestic agendas in the fields of LLL and VET, the data show a differentiation between former EU-15 Member States and the new ones in terms of degree of information, access to information, and use of information in the domestic agenda.

The conclusion here is clear: the way the social partners conceive their role in education and training, and the scope of their action in these matters closely relates to their national institutional context.

Chapter 5 examines and compares the cross-industry and the sectoral responses, and also compares the situation in the different sectors covered by the study.

Overall, the interviewees would like to be better informed on the European affairs for the sector-level players in general, without any clear differentiation from one branch to another. At sector-level within the countries, there is a strong and clear demand for having available more information, which is the key word, mentioned by all respondents. The need of information is associated with clearness, but also with comparability of data across countries.

This, in turn, highlights the prevalence of the national context over sectoral logics, with no clear cross-border similarities in a given sector across the different countries. The data also show that LLL and VET policies cannot be considered as following a simple top-down approach from the European institutions to the national States, and from there to the cross-industry level to the sector players and, finally, to companies.

In addition, the sectoral comparison allows to conclude that sectoral social partners are more concerned with the provision of continuing training. The liberalisation, technological change and demographic impact on sectors (e.g., in telecommunication, trade, road transport, post and courier, electricity and chemical industry) are issues that made them focus on continuing training strategies to face such challenges. Some different types of situations have been identified where closer

cooperation with sectoral social partners should be established, if planning set up working strategies to support sectoral stakeholders.

If it is consider the degree of awareness of sector-level social partners for VET issues and their role in building collective agreements for the sector, there are four types of situations:

- (a) the social partners have not approached VET issues, and there is no collective bargaining in the sector on these issues (e.g. road transport in Lithuania);
- (b) the social partners have a partial interest in VET issues, even where collective bargaining takes place at sector level (e.g. electricity in Hungary);
- (c) the social partners are interested in VET issues, but collective bargaining takes place at another level than the sector or concentrates on other aspects (e.g. telecoms in Romania, chemical industry in Slovakia);
- (d) the social partners are interested in VET issues and these are included in collective bargaining and agreements taking place at sector level, e.g. telecoms, postal services and electricity in France. The chemical industry in Germany, electricity in Sweden, trade, the chemical industry and electricity in Italy, also give interesting examples of such a situation.

Chapter 6 focuses on the role of the European cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue in LLL and training. At European level, cross-industry social partners are more informed and involved in such issues than they are within the countries. The European organisations are currently active in the field, they write guidelines or joint opinions that intend to reach their national members.

The outcomes from both developed interviews and mapping exercise of texts and joint opinions of European cross-sectoral and working programmes of European Sectoral social partners, show that the interest for LLL and VET is progressively growing among stakeholders at European level (in particular, during 2004-08 period). Some interesting experiences related to Copenhagen priorities should required further analysis and follow up.

In addition, findings allow saying that closer involvement of European sectoral social partners would be a key strategy to benefit awareness and approaches of social partners organisations at national-sectoral levels on European education and training matters. In addition, they can play an important role as a link to facilitate wider contributions of the social partners organisations in other networks and projects (e.g. Skills needs, ECVET, Europass).

Finally, the concluding chapter synthesises in depth the main findings going further presenting several proposals to develop further research on social dialogue on VET and LLL, while bearing in mind planning further tailored support to social partners to contribute on enhanced European cooperation in VET/LLL.

Many challenges remain when working towards enhanced cooperation principles in VET and LLL within a complex system of multi-level governance where the social partners' involvement in European policies is still far to be considered as a simple top-down process. It leads to several hypotheses stating that social partner's role is constrained by societal specificities, which include the industrial relations framework, as well as education and training structures. In this context, the role to play by governance tools such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) will continue being crucial to support enhanced cooperation in VET in the framework of the Copenhagen process.

The foremost hypothesis contrasted in the light of the information collected is that LLL and VET are at a core position on the European social partners' agendas. Training, in general, is a topic that is increasingly becoming an object of social partners' strong interest, concern and action – at all levels – from a cognitive point of view, but also in the practical agenda of collective bargaining and in joint texts.

Further, the trade unions and employer organisations have a large range of common objectives such as to pay more attention to adaptability of company and workers in the context of industrial change; update and reinforce legal and coordination aspects of training; working on methods to improve knowledge on future skills needs and examine and widespread good practices among social partners. Nevertheless, the points of view on LLL and training issues differ in several dimensions, such as the main purpose of training or the degree of expected adaptation of training to specific job situations.

The terms 'lifelong learning' or 'vocational education and training' are not widely used by the interviewed social partners. In the light of the conducted survey, the four priorities matched by the European cross-industry social partners on the framework of actions for lifelong development of competencies and qualifications have been verified as key drivers for the stakeholders performing on education and training within their national contexts, regardless of whether they are in practice less or more aware on the European policies in the field.

In any case, as far as European policies are concerned, generally the interviewees in the countries would acknowledge to be raise their awareness on European matters of education and training (e.g. Copenhagen process, Education and training 2010 work programme). This would be particularly important at some national and sectoral levels included in the sample.

Thus, it could be assumed that links between the social partners' agenda and the Copenhagen priorities, when they exist, result from 'convergence without coordination', from common concerns and challenges, rather than from top-down coordination (Hancké, 2002; Marginson and Sisson, 2004).

In industrial relations terms, the results show that there are two clusters of countries according to the levels how training issues are discussed among both sides of the industry within social dialogue and/or collective bargaining. On one hand, the former Member States (Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy and Sweden) where training is negotiated either at inter-sectoral or at branch level (and in companies, as well). On the other hand, the chosen sample of new Member States (Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) where training strategies are predominantly developed at company level (at managers' own initiative), with some exceptions at national and sectoral levels.

A relevant finding is that many national/sectoral social partners have linguistic/communication barriers in understanding and communicating in English (as first option) and/or other European languages. This is a crucial aspect to be taken into account to set up 'top-down' strategies and/or further closer approaches to involve more actively social partners in European issues on education and training, in particular at meso (sectors/territories) and micro- levels (sub-sectoral/local).

The interviewees have identified some of these needs and requirements. They are very similar from one country to another, except a stronger need in the new Member States for more information about European processes and for comparative data to be more aware on other 'realities'.

Regarding relationships between the European cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue, and LLL and VET, it becomes clear that at European level the cross-industry social partners are widely informed and involved in such issues than they are within the countries. The European organisations are highly active in the field, delivering guidelines and/or joint opinions that intend to reach their national members – they are foremost players on the development of the Copenhagen process on education and training.

In the sectoral social dialogue committees, the interest for LLL and VET is speedily increasing (observed in particular from 2004 to 2008). Such interest is providing numerous initiatives. The analysis reveals that there is no clear trend in the joint texts, with the number of texts on LLL and VET remaining stable over the years, but such interest is becoming increasingly vivid if we look at the their work programmes. How the content of the joint work programmes translates into practice is a question that could be scope of further research and analysis.

It is important to remind that when proposing future strategies it would be essential to consider the particular national specificities and industrial relations (stage of development of the social dialogue on education and training) of Member States (former and new ones) in order to differentiate approaches. Some implications to be addressed to social partners, researchers and other stakeholders are:

- (a) increasing awareness of European processes could be further supported by development of working strategies with European social partners and focussing, in particular, on the potential involvement of the European sectoral social dialogue committees;
- (b) similarly, the differences between the new and the old Member States indicate that in occasions it would be useful to adapt the approach to support them, for instance, by setting up information and dissemination strategies on European issues focusing on practical and/or easy-to use information in the new Member States. On the other hand, more 'sophisticated' actions in those countries where the social partners have a long-established tradition in the field of training should be addressed;
- (c) some other exchanges of practices and/or research strategies should be planned accurately by balancing and stratifying strategically participation of relevant players within both clusters. As a result, it can provide clear win-win situations. For instance, by the creation of social partners networks on relevant issues and/or innovative partnerships and/or collection of systematic information about social partners achievements in VET/LLL. In this regard, further research and understanding of the potential role of learning partnerships, in particular focusing on sectoral changes, should be a matter of reflection in the medium-term;
- (d) a crucial aspect which should be further explored, developed and debated are the future implications of education and training in the frame of the industrial relations. The potential role of the social dialogue and its current and future influence on the collective bargaining to promote training provision, in particular at sectoral and work place levels, should constitute a matter of deeper analysis and discussion. In this particular area, exploring content and impact of training clauses at national and sectoral levels would be an information gap to be filled. In addition, the important role to play by unions should be engaged in discussion within employees organisations;
- (e) another important aspect focus on the crucial role of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) as a governance tool for education and training. Further development of research on governance process on education and training policies may contribute on support policy makers and practitioners community;
- (f) the value employers and employees attach to training regarding employability and competitiveness should be a dimension to be deeper explored. The follow up on the role of the social partners in implementing the European tools on education and training (e.g. EQF, ECVET, Europass) could have implications at medium-term for the labour relations, for instance, on mobility aspects within working places, professional classifications, etc.;

- (g) these aspects are linked to current debates on flexicurity pathways and the place occupied within this frame by skills policies to improve working conditions;
- (h) another important aspect to be improved is related to statistical tools. Indeed, indicators to measure social dialogue dynamics are still underdeveloped;
- (i) the publication also shows that adult learners, regardless on whether they are considered risk groups, are in the centre of concerns by the social partners when they negotiate provision of training;
- (j) the development of the social dialogue in LLL appears as a clear topic to be more developed and explored. There would be a lot of room to increase cooperation and enhance coordination with those organisations which participated on the strategy framework of actions for lifelong development of competences and qualifications (plus those affiliated at ETUC, Business Europe, CEEP and UEAPME in the new and in the candidates countries).
- (k) in the light of information gaps of the social partners on European issues, lack of bargaining on education and training and/or linguistic barriers (improvement of European languages, particularly English) a clear strategy to develop would be to set up training actions accompanied by internal debates within stakeholders organisations may support them to perform better on the European context of VET and LLL.

Finally, all these issues confirm that Cedefop is providing a distinctive added value through its services and by cooperating actively with the social partners within the frame of the Copenhagen process.

1. The research background: objectives and methodology

The project was inspired by the report of 1997, *Cedefop and the social partners* (Cedefop, Theunissen, 1997) ⁽⁶⁾ but many changes in LLL and in the social dialogue have taken place since then and must be considered.

First, the European employment strategy, formally initiated in 1997, and later the Lisbon Agenda, transformed institutional context for LLL policies and social dialogue. Both attach crucial importance to LLL for economic growth and employment. This goes along with institutional developments in VET, the 'Bruges-Copenhagen process' and the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002 on enhanced European cooperation in VET (EC, 2002), until the Helsinki Communiqué of December 2006 (EC, 2006a) (these developments are presented in Chapter 1).

In parallel, the two enlargements of 2004 and 2007 have extended the European Union (EU), and have resulted in the inclusion of industrial relations systems that differ largely from the ones of older EU-15 Member States. Education and training structures in the new Member States, but also industrial relations traditions, differ from the former Member States and now present a high degree of heterogeneity.

In the meantime, social dialogue at European level has undergone several developments. These include the consolidation of the institutional framework with the inclusion of the Articles 138 and 139 in the EU Treaty, which gives social partners the institutional possibility to conclude agreements and to implement them either via social dialogue in the Member States or via legislative intervention. An adapted institutional framework has simultaneously developed for the EU sector-level social dialogue, with the Commission's decision of 1998 on the establishment of the sectoral dialogue committees (EC, 1998).

In this context, specific developments precisely concern LLL. In March 2002, the cross-industry social partners have adopted a framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications. Since then they have issued three annual reports on the national actions carried out on the priorities set in their joint text (in 2003, 2004 and 2005). In 2006, ETUC et al. (p. 4) presented their joint evaluation report evaluating 'the impact of their actions on both companies and workers after three annual reports'.

⁽⁶⁾ Cedefop (1997), *Cedefop and the social partners, Information and discussion document*, Thessaloniki: Cedefop, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5065_1en.pdf

In March 2006, the cross-industry social partners also made public their work programme for the years 2006-08, which includes, among the key challenges facing Europe's labour markets, LLL, competitiveness, innovation and the integration of the disadvantaged groups on the labour markets. In parallel, social partners in the sectoral social dialogue committees have reached joint texts that also cover learning issues: 38 joint documents adopted between 1978 to 2004 included provisions on training (Pochet and Degryse, 2005).

Consequently, the context has changed since 1997, both in LLL and in the social dialogue. Accordingly, the publication presented here aims at update information published a decade ago by Cedefop, but also to reflect the social partners' needs and requirements that could be addressed by Cedefop in the current context, considering the important recent developments.

1.1. The objectives of the research

The main aim of the conducted research has been to identify how the social partners are dealing with the priorities and principles of the Copenhagen process on education and training at European, national and sectoral levels.

More precisely, the research focused on the following specific objectives:

- (a) collecting information to gain better understanding about perceptions, concerns and demands of the social partners when focussing in training provision at different levels;
- (b) obtaining accurate information that could update achievements and developments in LLL and VET, on social partners' side;
- (c) provide an overview on the current dynamics of LLL in the frame of the social dialogue paying particular attention on the situation of the new Member States;
- (d) gaining better understanding of communication and information processes with stakeholders, at European and national level, to set up more tailored support to social partners organisations in the framework of the Copenhagen process, if possible.

1.2. The methodology of the research

The research method has been based on a qualitative approach. The empirical work was based on two main steps which includes documentary search and interviews:

- (a) a documentary and literature review. The main findings compose the second chapter of the publication. Beyond the various documents issued by the European

- Commission, the Council and Cedefop used, the empirical data contain a compilation of joint texts and work programmes stemming from the European sectoral social dialogue and that refer to training issues;
- (b) implementation of semi-structured interviews to sample of 87 relevant stakeholders distributed between chosen countries and sectors;
 - (c) the research process received 'external' feed backs from a steering group composed by relevant social partners members (ETUC, BusinessEurope, UEAPME, CEEP) coordinated by Cedefop.

1.2.1. The interviews and the sample

1.2.1.1. A semi-structured interview guide

The most important part of the empirical work is constituted by interviews with a large panel of social partners at different levels: European cross-industry social partners, European sectoral social partners, national trade unions and employers associations at cross-industry and sectoral level.

Due to the complexity and the scope of the subject to cover, semi-structured interviews have been chosen as the appropriate empirical tool to approach these different levels with both sufficient flexibility and in-depth questions. The objective was to obtain in-depth answers rather than short responses that could be given to a written questionnaire (Quivy and Van Campenhoudt, 1995). The answers must be considered as the respondents' position and discourse, since they do not necessarily reflect the actual practice, which would require closer observation and additional data.

The interviews were conducted with a common semi-structured interview guide, which was progressively refined by Cedefop and UCL/IST (the complete interview guide is attached in the annex). They have been realised in English, Spanish or French. National correspondents have conducted interviews in other languages in Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Each interview was synthesised in English along a common structure to facilitate the analysis.

1.2.1.2. Target sample

The survey had no ambition to be statistically representative. It intended, rather, to cover a wide range of points of view among the social partners. The interviewees are members of a representative trade union or employer organisations. Most of the time they were chosen because they are the persons involved in training and LLL issues within their organisation.

The selection of countries where interviews have been conducted ensures that old and new Member States are covered, but also that different types of countries are

included (large/small; different industrial relations traditions). As agreed between Cedefop and UCL/IST, the final sample of countries is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1. Final sample of countries

Former Member States	Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden
New Member States	Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia

Source: Cedefop (2007).

In terms of levels of industrial relations, the number of interviews conducted at cross-industry and at sectoral level differs from one country to another according to the specific structure of each national industrial relations system. In the EU-15 Member States, the cross-industry and the sectoral levels are important arenas of industrial relations in all the countries except, to some extent, the UK.

In the new Member States and in the candidate countries, the cross-industry level is a significant level of industrial relations, even if it is not the main one for wage bargaining, whereas the sector is generally weakly developed.

As for the selection of sectors, the intention was to cover the same sectors at European and national level to allow for comparison between the levels and between the countries. The sectors selected respond to several criteria defined by Cedefop and UCL/IST:

- (a) they include industry and services as well as private and public services; they leave space for a representation of SMEs;
- (b) they face specific challenges in terms of competences and mobility;
- (c) they have a European sectoral social dialogue committee where discussions on LLL have taken place or are taking place, and where joint texts have been produced on the issue;
- (d) they are not too small or specific.

Finally the choice includes trade, telecommunications, post and courier activities, electricity, chemical industry, and road transport.

1.2.1.3. Final sample

Table 2 details the final sample and indicates how interviews are distributed between countries, levels and sectors. The smaller number of interviews at European level is due to the high degree of convergence between the different respondents, who gave similar answers. The first interviews conducted with representatives of the cross-industry and sectoral social partners showed that the points of view are converging strongly.

Therefore, it was assessed as not necessary to multiply tenfold the number of interviews. The strategy to approach the European level has then been adapted and it decided to re-focus on the European social partners' joint texts and work programmes. The Observatoire Social Européen (OSE) databases of joint texts and work programmes has been exploited to identify all occurrences of training issues in the social partners' debates, including all sectoral working programmes.

Table 2. **Final distribution of the interviews**

		Cross-industry	Trade	Telecoms	Courier	Electricity	Chemical industry	Road transport	Employers/ trade unions per country	Total per country
Belgium	Employers	2			1				3	11
	Trade unions	5			1		1	1	8	
Germany	Employers	1					2	1	4	8
	Trade unions	2					1	1	4	
Ireland	Employers	2							2	3
	Trade unions	1							1	
Spain	Employers	1	1						2	5
	Trade unions	2	1						3	
France	Employers	1		1	2	1			5	9
	Trade unions	2		*		2			4	
Italy	Employers	1	1						2	5
	Trade unions	1				1	1		3	
Lithuania	Employers	1					1		2	6
	Trade unions	1				1	1	1	4	
Hungary	Employers						1		1	5
	Trade unions	1			1	1	1		4	
Poland	Employers	1							1	8
	Trade unions	2		1	1		1	2	7	
Romania	Employers	1					1		2	6
	Trade unions	1		1		1	1		4	
Slovakia	Employers	1		1	1	1	1		5	9
	Trade unions	1		1	**	1	1		4	
Sweden	Employers					1			1	5
	Trade unions	2	1			1			4	
EU	Employers	2	1						3	7
	Trade unions	1				1	1	1	4	
Total (N)		36	5	5	7	12	15	7	87	87
Sub-total	Employers	14	3	2	4	3	6	1	33	33
	Trade unions	22	2	3	3	9	9	6	54	54

* France: one respondent for cross-industry and for the telecommunication sector.

** Slovak Republic: one union respondent for telecommunications and courier.

At each level, special attention has been paid to get a balance between respondents on employers' and on unions' side. However, in many cases at national or sectoral levels, there are more trade unions' than employers' respondents. This again reflects the structure of the national industrial relations: in many countries there are more trade union associations than employers' federations or confederations. For instance, in Belgium or in France, there is only one major employer organisation, whereas there are several organisations on trade union side.

As for the distribution of interviews in the countries, in some country it has been not possible to reach respondents in sectoral organisations. This however reflects that characteristics of industrial relations systems on the tested sample, and where bargaining mostly takes place at cross-industry and at company level.

In terms of distribution between the sectors, the small number of interviews in the trade sector is due to the fact that the social partners in this branch were exceptionally difficult to identify and to reach. Some respondents gave a possible explanation to this situation: the fact that this sector is composed of small and very small enterprises can be a reason why trade unions and employers' organisations are more dispersed than elsewhere, and why training is not an essential issue for them.

It is worth noting here that the approach focuses on cross-industry and sectoral social partners, who gave their own point of view on LLL and VET at their respective level. The answers collected, therefore, do not allow drawing conclusions on actual developments within companies, beyond the representation that higher-level trade unionists and employer federation's representatives reflect in the interviews. This is particularly true for SMEs. Getting information on developments within companies would require company cases, which was out of the scope of this project.

2. Introduction: European developments and challenges in LLL

This chapter examines the notion of lifelong learning (LLL), and the origins and developments of the notion in Europe. The sections summarises the institutional developments that have led to the Copenhagen Declaration (EC, 2002) and the Helsinki Communiqué (EC, 2006a). In addition, it examined the question of implementing these policies in national contexts, which in turn leads to the question of governance. The last parts of the chapter focus on the role of social partners.

2.1. The origins and progressive shift in conception: the first steps

The notion of LLL (education and training throughout life) is to be found in European debates since the 1990s. However, from the 1970s the principle begins to gain importance in the debate on the policies to put in place with regard to education and training. The ideas that come to the fore are then those of lifelong education (education throughout one's life) or permanent education. Therefore attention was mainly directed towards adult education and particularly towards those individuals whose initial schooling might be considered inadequate. The success of this notion does, however, remain fairly limited, as does its application in terms of education policy (Field, 2000a).

In the 1990s, the concept of LLL appears in texts of the European Commission, the OECD, Unesco or even the G8 (Field, 2000a). But the notion takes on a different meaning. First, the vision underlying the concept is no longer a humanist one, but owes more to the needs of the economy, particularly the link between learning, on the one hand, and the labour market, employment and economic growth on the other.

Then, it is the totality of different phases of learning which is involved in this notion, whereas previously the accent was put on the possibilities of offering a second chance to individuals by focusing on second and third cycle training. Finally, one can underline the fact that this approach implies that the individual takes greater responsibility for his or her own training: here, training is almost considered to be a duty, whereas previously there had been a tendency to think of it as a right (Maroy, 2001).

A definition of LLL becomes established as a reference as from 2001. It is the one proposed in 2001 by the European Commission in its Communication on making a European area of lifelong learning a reality: 'responses to the consultation on the

Memorandum called for a broad definition of lifelong learning that is not limited to a purely economic outlook or just to learning for adults. In addition to the emphasis it places on learning from pre-school to post-retirement, lifelong learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The consultation also highlighted the objectives of learning, including active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion, as well as employment-related aspects. The principles which underpin lifelong learning and guide its effective implementation emphasise the centrality of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities' (EC, 2001, pp. 3-4).

2.2. The recent context and new challenges

Over the last decade, the concept of LLL arises as a response to the structural changes of the last three decades, such as globalisation, new information technologies, scientific developments, changes in the structure of employment and demographic trends, etc. (Field, 2000a; Mahieu, 2003). Like others, Field (2000b) and Mahieu (2003) observe that we have moved from the industrial society to the knowledge or information society. Knowledge, and particularly lifelong education, is now meant to play a crucial role. There are then multiple underlying challenges: economic (economic growth, flexibility at work), social (cohesion and social integration), but also cultural (citizenship, personal enrichment) (Emin, 2003; Gorard and Rees, 2002; OECD, 1996).

Nowadays, it is widely recognised that knowledge represents an important driver for competitiveness and economic growth (Gorard and Rees, 2002). In the continuously changing society in which we live, the need for adaptability of individuals is evident in terms of employment and daily lives (Maroy, 2001). With regard to work, flexibility has become the order of the day, given the innovation processes and constant changes that are occurring. To be able to adapt, workers are required to have multiple skills and, preferably, to acquire new ones (Gorard and Rees, 2002; Hasan, 1997; Léné, 2005; Maroy, 2001). In such a perspective, individuals have the responsibility of increasing their employability through education and training. Therefore, in this prospect, knowledge does not only lead to economic growth but it can also improve an individual's quality of life (Gorard and Rees 2002).

The notion of LLL also contains the idea of guaranteed access for all to educational and training systems (Gorard and Rees, 2002; Hasan, 1997; Mahieu, 2003). Access to learning must then be de-coupled from sociological constraints and particular attention should be paid to sections of the population which are at risk,

excluded from society, or whose basic schooling can be considered inadequate (Gorard and Rees, 2002).

Furthermore, citizenship in the information society is particularly dependent on access to training and information technology. Being a citizen in a 'global' world also presupposes the development of certain skills and attitudes, such as a capacity to practice several languages, cultural skills, behavioural skills, etc. (Field, 2000a).

Lastly, LLL is now taking up its place in the wider context of individualisation and reflexive modernisation (Field, 2000b; Maroy, 1998; 2001). Today, individuals are constantly required to make choices and decisions, which means that the individual is expected to be active and autonomous in his/her pursuit of training (Field, 2000b; Gorard and Rees, 2002; Mahieu, 2003). If we consider the current mission of education, one sees that it is focused on the necessity of 'learning to learn' and also on the development of autonomy and creativity (Maroy, 2001).

2.3. Institutional developments at European level: the emergence of a European concern

The EU started developing the idea of LLL and integrating it into the heart of its policies in the 1990s when Europe was confronted to a major unemployment crisis that led the decision-makers to think about competitiveness in terms of employment and training.

In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty recognised the importance of education and training to promote a more competitive economy. In its Article 3, the Treaty mentions that 'the activities of the Community shall include, [...] a contribution to education and training of quality and to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States'. Further, in its Articles 126 and 127, the Treaty emphasised the importance of developing a European dimension in education but also in vocational training (Frazier, 1995, pp. 25-26).

The Treaty mentioned the contribution of the Community in terms of education, but the conditions of a common policy were not yet settled. The distribution of competences between the Community and the Member States was defined during the following years via what, since then, is called the Copenhagen process.

From 1993, lifelong education and training became a veritable leitmotiv of the European Commission, with the publication of the white paper on growth, competitiveness and employment (EC, 1993). This was followed in 1995 by another white paper on teaching and learning; towards the knowledge society (EC, 1995). Three driving forces were put forward in the latter text, which entailed putting into effect certain reforms with regard to the education and training policies: the information society, globalisation, and the technical and scientific civilisation (Maroy, 1998).

Various reform measures were envisaged, particularly the attribution of value to skills acquired by individuals through both formal and informal channels, the recognition of those skills, the opening up of access to training by providing information and guidance and mobility, the development of partnerships between different types of training institutions, etc. (Maroy, 1998; 2001). The issues at stake were not only economic, aiming at maintaining the competitiveness of the EU, but also social: it was considered necessary to both reintegrate those who have been excluded and develop training programmes aimed at the more vulnerable parts of the population (Maroy, 1998).

2.4. The Lisbon European Council (2000)

In 2000, the Lisbon European Council set strategic goals for 2010 with the aim 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. In this perspective, education and training systems were recognised as essential points to focus on, and therefore they needed to be adapted to the demands of the knowledge society (Leonardi, 2004; Lindley, 2003; Rodrigues, 2003).

LLL was therefore considered as an essential element for the development of citizenship, social cohesion and employment.

Later the Barcelona Council in March 2002 confirmed that full employment was the overarching goal of the EU and therefore called for a reinforced employment strategy to underpin the Lisbon agenda in an enlarged EU. In this context, the Member States were expected to implement coherent and comprehensive strategies, set targets, improve the quality and efficiency of education and training systems, and encourage public and private investment in human resources (Council, 2002). The Council directive gave a new impetus to the process begun by the Directors-General leading to the Copenhagen Declaration (EC, 2002) and establishing the bases of the Bruges-Copenhagen-Maastricht process ⁽⁷⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ The Directors-General of vocational training meet every six months in the country holding the EU Presidency. The group of Directors General consists of senior civil servants in the ministries of education and employment in the EU and EFTA/EEA Member States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and works in cooperation with the social partners. The European Commission and the European social partners are also represented, as well as Cedefop and European Training Foundation (ETF). The aim of the meeting is twofold. First and foremost, the meeting serves as an advisory forum and provides the European Commission with the informal points of view of the Member States, before they appear elsewhere on the agenda. In addition, it enables the members of the group to exchange information about vocational training in different countries.

2.5. The crucial milestone: the Copenhagen-Maastricht-Helsinki process (2002-06)

Following the Bruges initiative of the Directors General for VET from October 2001, Ministers for VET of 31 European countries (Member States, candidate and European Economic Area countries) together with the European Commission, adopted on 30 November 2002 the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in VET (Cedefop, Tessaring et al., 2004, p. 60). The declaration gave a mandate to develop concrete actions to improve the effectiveness, quality and attractiveness of VET, to promote development of the European job market and, consequently, to improve the competitiveness of the Member States (EC, 2002).

Four major priorities were settled in the Declaration:

- (a) strengthening the European dimension in VET: This is a central priority on the declaration. The point raises the idea to build up and European education and training area covering VET branches. The integration of European countries by working in partnerships to support Europe to become a world wide reference for learners is a key principle to achieve this priority;
- (b) transparency, information and guidance: this means increasing transparency in VET through the implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks (Europass, common tool carrying details of competencies and qualifications, implemented in 2005). It also means strengthening policies, systems and practices that support information, guidance and counselling in the Member States (lifelong guidance supports occupational and geographical mobility of European citizens and aims to optimise participation in relevant VET);
- (c) recognition of competences and qualifications:
 - (i) developing reference levels, common principles for certification and common measures, including a credit transfer system for VET (for recognition, comparability, transferability of competences and qualifications, greater coherence between national qualifications systems);
 - (ii) increasing support to the development of qualifications and competences at sectoral level, by reinforcing cooperation and coordination especially involving the social partners;
 - (iii) common principles for validation of non formal and informal learning (comparability of approaches in different countries and levels);
- (d) quality assurance:
 - (i) promoting cooperation in quality assurance; common criteria and principles for quality in VET;
 - (ii) giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers within all forms of VET.

The implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration was based on a voluntary approach and principally developed through bottom-up cooperation, inspired by the open method of coordination (OMC), with follow-up of the objectives and an evaluation based on five benchmarks ⁽⁸⁾ proposed by the Commission to measure the progress made and to support the exchange of best practices and peer-review (EC, 2002).

2.5.1. The Maastricht Communiqué (2004)

On the 14 December 2004, the Education ministers from 32 countries, the European social partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen their cooperation in terms of education and training. The Maastricht Communiqué updated the Copenhagen declaration, reported on progress made since November 2002, and set out new priorities and strategies for the coming two years (EC, 2004b).

According to the Communiqué, the Copenhagen process between 2002 and 2004 had succeeded in raising the visibility of VET at the European level and in the Lisbon strategy. The Communiqué also considered that the different participating countries and stakeholders reached common understanding of the specific challenges concerned and agreed on strategies and on means to implement these objectives.

In the chapter on implementation and follow up, the Communiqué invited all actors in the field of VET, including social partners, to take their responsibilities and 'to contribute to making effective the implementation of the Copenhagen process at all levels' (EC, 2004b, p. 4). It also underlined the Cedefop's and ETF's specific role to support the implementation of the Copenhagen process and to use their networks (ReferNet and national observatories) to report, monitor progress and exchange experience.

2.5.2. The Helsinki Communiqué (2006)

After Copenhagen and Maastricht, the Ministers for VET from the Members States, the candidate and European Economic Area countries, together with representatives of the social partners and the European Commission, participated to the Helsinki meeting on 4 and 5 December 2006.

⁽⁸⁾ Such benchmarks were issued in 2002 (EC, 2002) and are as follows:

- by 2010, all Member States should at least halve the rate of early school leavers, in reference to the rate recorded in the year 2000, to achieve an EU-average rate of 9% or less;
- by 2010, all Member States will have at least halved the level of gender imbalance among graduates in mathematics, science and technology, while securing an overall significant increase of the total number of graduates compared to the year 2000;
- by 2010, Member States should ensure that the average percentage of 25-59 year olds in the EU with at least upper secondary education reaches 80% or more;
- by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15 year olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy will be at least halved in each Member State;
- by 2010, the EU-average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 15% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group) and in no country should it be lower than 10%.

The Helsinki Communiqué outlined the position of VET in Europe and adopted objectives for the next two-year period of European cooperation in the field of VET. The process was evaluated and its strategies and priorities were reviewed (EC, 2007). This last Communiqué focused especially on the development of tools and the recognition of competences and qualifications to favour the mobility of the workers throughout Europe.

At first, the Helsinki Communiqué aims to policy focused on improving the attractiveness and quality of VET: participating countries should pay more attention to the image, status and attractiveness of VET. This includes improved guidance throughout life, open VET systems to improve transition to working life, close links with working life, recognition of non-formal and informal learning, measures to increase interest and participation of men and women in fields in which they are under-represented, developing and highlighting excellence in skills.

More emphasis should also be placed on good governance of VET systems and providers, through responsiveness to the needs of individuals and the labour market, highly qualified teachers and trainers, national quality assurance, improving public and private investment in VET, increased transparency of VET systems, stronger leadership of institutions and/or training providers within national strategies, partnership between different decision-makers and stakeholders, in particular social partners and sectoral organisations.

The Communiqué specifically emphasised the development and implementation of common European tools to be in place by 2010: those specifically aimed at VET, e.g. the ECVET and the European network of quality assurance for VET (ENQA-VET) and those in which VET plays a major role, such as the EQF based on learning outcomes and Europass. These tools are intended to make recognition of competences and qualifications easier and to promote mobility for learning and working throughout Europe.

The third objective aims at strengthening mutual learning, by a more systematic approach and adequate data: common concepts and definitions, Commission funding for research and surveys, monitoring and exchange of best practice, etc. By 2008, the Commission should have given attention to improving the scope, comparability and reliability of VET statistics, to the development of common indicators and benchmarks, and to the development of statistical information.

And finally, the Communiqué insists on the active involvement of all stakeholders in the field of VET, 'including in particular the social partners at European and national level, sectoral organisations and VET providers' (EC, 2007, p. 9).

As was the case in the Maastricht Communiqué, the Helsinki Communiqué insists on the continued support of Cedefop and ETF and their networks to monitor progress

in the priority areas and report on the developments (EC, 2007, p. 10, chapter IV on implementation and reporting).

2.6. From Copenhagen to Helsinki: taking stock of the major developments

What are the differences between the content of the original declaration and the more recent Helsinki Communiqué? Table 1 attempts to synthesise the major developments in the priorities such as they were termed in the initial Copenhagen Declaration of 2002, in the Maastricht Communiqué in 2004, and in the Helsinki Communiqué of 2006. It shows that the priorities have become precise and more tool-oriented, with the progressive specification of defined tools and procedures to support VET across the countries involved.

2.7. Implementing LLL policies in different national contexts

In 2004, following the conference organised by Cedefop on lifelong training, a report was published (Cedefop, 2004) which highlighted certain weaknesses in the implementation of the principles of LLL in the Member States. According to the report, the quality of professional training and education varies greatly between the different States and the social partners are not sufficiently involved in the implementation of these policies. It would seem that companies do not give enough importance to training within the company or the agreements reached between the social partners and the public-private partnerships. According to Cedefop findings, the countries all admit to a certain delay in terms of the practices set up with a view to achieving the objectives of the Lisbon strategy.

The European policies for education and training were intended to be a driver for change in the national education and training systems. However, the implementation of the principles and objectives seem to have encountered two major difficulties: the national systems with their long history and their own institutions, and the expression of different forms of governance. These two problem areas are briefly examined in following pages.

Table 3. **From Copenhagen to Helsinki: summary of developments**

	Copenhagen Declaration 29-30 November 2002	Maastricht Communiqué 14 December 2004	Helsinki Communiqué 5 December 2006
General characteristic	European dimension: improving closer cooperation	Distinction between national and European level	Evaluation of the process; priorities reviewed; more focused approach
Objectives focused on common references and tools: exchange of experience between countries	Recognition of competences and qualifications: • developing reference levels, common principles for certification and common measures (including a credit transfer system); • support to development of competences and qualifications at sector level; • common principles for validation of informal learning.	European level: • development of a EQF, development and implementation of ECVET; • mapping of sectoral activities; • using outcomes of Leonardo da Vinci projects.	Strengthening mutual learning by a more systematic approach and adequate data: • common concepts and definitions, Commission funding for research and surveys, monitoring and exchange of best practice, etc.; • improvement of VET statistics focussing on investment and funding figures.
	Implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks (European CV, Europass) Strengthening policies, systems and practices that support information, guidance and counselling in member states	National level: • use of common instruments, references and principles to support the development of VET systems and practices.	Further development and implementation of common European tools in which VET plays a major role specifically aimed specifically at VET, e.g. EQF, ECVET and the European Network of Quality Assurance for VET (ENQA-VET), Europass. Ensure investments in skills.

Objectives focused on individuals	Initiatives must be focussed on the needs of citizens and user organisations	Development of VET systems for people or groups at risk. Appropriate guidance and counselling Learning-conducive environments Competence development of teachers and trainers.	Improved guidance throughout life. Create better conditions for transition to working life; Links with working life Recognition of informal/ non formal learning Participation of men and women in fields where they are under-represented Highlighting excellence in skills Responsiveness to the needs of individuals and the labour market
Quality assurance	Quality assurance: • exchange of models and methods, common criteria and principles for quality; • attention to learning needs of teachers and trainers.	European level: • attention to learning needs and role of teachers and trainers; • improving public and/or private investment in VET; public-private partnership; • use of European Social Fund and European Regional Fund to support development of VET.	Highly qualified teachers and trainers. National quality assurance. Improving public and private investment in VET. Increased transparency of VET systems. Stronger leadership of institutions and/or training providers within national strategies.
Stakeholders involvement/ participation	Implementation and follow up: Commission reporting to Council, final paragraph on necessity of enhanced cooperation, including the social partners	Implementation and follow up: necessary contribution of all actors in the field of VET; point is on role of Cedefop and European Training Foundation (ETF). Closer links with social partners: at European, national and sectoral levels.	Good governance of VET systems and providers. Taking all stakeholders on board: active involvement of all stakeholders, including in particular the social partners at European and national level, sectoral organisations and VET partnership between different decision-makers and stakeholders, in particular social partners and sectoral organisations providers.

2.7.1. LLL and societal models

The educational systems vary within the EU and the implementation of LLL policies depends, to a great extent, on the institutional framework. While the principles are common to the Member States, they cannot be translated in the same way into national policies (Verdier, 2007). Lawn and Lingard (2002) also underline the fact that the States do not all take account of external influences in the realm of education. They argue that the States use supranational references in a relatively pragmatic way as a justification or confirmation of the efforts made at national level.

This state of affairs can be understood in the light of a neo-institutionalist approach (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Scott, 1995). In fact, the institutional changes to be carried out in each country are a function of the 'path dependency': the existing institutions generate regulatory or legal constraints, normative obstacles or cognitive limits (Campbell, 2004) which constraint and influence the shape of the change process. In other words, and specifically in the field of education and training, there are 'societal' specificities (Maurice et al., 1982) that result in the fact that the interpretation of the change proposed at European level, its rate and the implementation paths needed are relatively open and may vary between the different Member States.

With this in mind, it is important to consider these existing differences between the national educational and training systems, and the diversity that occurs in the implementation of the European principles in the Member States. Following the logic of the 'societal' approach and the neo-institutionalist analysis, Verdier (Buechtemann and Verdier, 1998; Verdier, 2001) proposes a classification of the different systems. Buechtemann and Verdier (1998), in particular, attempt to compare and contrast the French, German and British systems.

The institutional differences (in the widest sense of the term, implying contexts that are as much based on norms as on legislation), also explain the different implications of the social partners in the national education and training systems. The corollary of this is that their role in the determination and implementation of LLL policies is likely to differ from one country to another.

2.7.2. The European governance in VET and the social partners: what governance?

Implementing the European policies for education and training raises two issues in terms of governance. The first one concerns the relationships between European-level governance and the national institutional background. The second one concerns the respective role of the State and the social partners.

As for the relationships between European policies and the national institutions, first it is useful to mention that national sovereignty over educational systems is

constantly referred to throughout the Copenhagen process (Charlier, 2004). The EU's recommendations on the subject remain recommendations, that is to say incitative instruments (Le Douaron, 2002), in the respect of the principle of subsidiarity ⁽⁹⁾ (Korver and Oeij, 2005).

In addition, Dale (2005) emphasises that work is being done with a view to developing new supranational forms of education and training. In his opinion, this has an important impact on national systems and calls for their restructuring. However, the author underlines that one should not consider that education policies have moved from national to supranational level. He believes it is important to consider the functional, scalar and sector divisions of governance when it comes to educational and training matters.

Dale represents these divisions in a three dimensional schema. First, one can find the different levels of governance and makes a distinction between the supranational, national and local levels ⁽¹⁰⁾. The second dimension refers to the coordinating body, which may be the State, the market, the community or the family. Finally, the third dimension relates to the activities or functions of governance identified by Dale such as financing, ownership and regulation. The different functions of governance when it comes to education and training can, therefore, be assumed by different agencies and at different levels: governance is 'pluri-scalar' (Dale, 2005).

One of the problems raised by the implementation of LLL principles is to be found in the linking and combining of these different levels. The open method of coordination is among the tools used in this framework to coordinate policies at European level.

The open method of coordination introduced a new means to conceive European policies. It is in fact perceived as a multi-level form of governance able to associate Member States, European institutions, social partners and representatives of the civil society to the definition and implementation of European strategies (de la Rosa, 2005). In this context, the Commission plays the role of coordinator and, then, does not intervene directly in the Member States' national contexts where different players intervene (de la Porte, 2002). According to Biagi (2000) and de la Porte

⁽⁹⁾ 'In areas other than those in which the Community has exclusive competence, the principle of subsidiarity seeks to uphold the capacity to take decisions and action at Community level when the scale and effects of the proposed action mean that the objectives would be better achieved at Community level. It also upholds the capacity of the Member States to take action in those areas that cannot be dealt with more effectively by Community action.' European Parliament Fact Sheets 11/2005 available from Internet: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/1_2_2_en.htm [cited 22.9.2008].

⁽¹⁰⁾ In contrast to Lawn and Lingard (2002), Dale (2005) presents the supranational level more as a distinct level of activity.

(2002), the social partners' involvement varies according to their usual participation in national processes and to the form of the social dialogue primarily established.

As Charlier (2004) notes, the open method of coordination is a set of rules that are not legally binding but are politically constraining. In his opinion, the Member States incur no risk of sanctions if they fail to apply the principles as defined at European level, but they could find themselves marginalised if they do not follow the movement.

However, regarding LLL, the process implemented is for now limited to a restrictive institutionalised benchmarking procedure. This overview shows that construction of a system of multi-level governance is a complex process of institutional learning which remains wide open to debate ⁽¹¹⁾. Beyond the coordination of diverging national institutional systems, the notion of governance raises the question of the respective role of the State and the civil society, including the social partners.

Governance generally ' [...] refers to a reconfiguration of the role of the State in general, seen as less authoritative, having a less hierarchical position in conducting economic, political and social change within countries. This is associated with processes of decision-making and policy implementation involving various actors from multiple arenas, such as unions and employers organisations, regions and local authorities, and civil society' (Eurofound, 2007, p. 6).

The European Foundation's report on *New structures, forms and processes of governance in European industrial relations* (Eurofound, 2007) shows that, from an industrial relations perspective, the role of trade unions and employer associations has always been envisaged as central in the regulation of labour and employment relationships. However the notion of governance, and more specifically of 'new governance', insists on the changing public governance that is currently at play and it underlines the fact that regulation in the broad sense involves both public and private actors. It also leads to consider that the trade unions and employers have to face changing socioeconomic contexts that weight on industrial relations.

Finally, governance refers to the increasing variety of instruments for European policies, which includes hard law and soft law instruments. The same is true for the instruments of the European social dialogue, that since the inclusion of Articles 138

⁽¹¹⁾ It should be noted that the principle of governance (supranational) has stimulated certain debates between several authors in the educational field, who are critical of it. According to Mahieu (2003), the debate about lifelong education and training questions at European level centres on the means and the instruments to put into action, in the absence of a true discussion of the end results at stake. Mahieu condemns the pragmatic and technocratic perspective which surrounds governance: '*La gouvernance, nécessairement "bonne" évacue toute visée politique pour lui substituer une série de techniques performatives, voire auto-réalisatrices*' (Governance, which is 'good' of necessity, ousts any political vision and puts in its place a series of performance techniques which are self-fulfilling) (Mahieu, 2003: p. 47).

to 139 of the revised Social Chapter in the European Commission Treaty in 1997, allow social partners in the cross-industry and the sectoral social dialogue to conclude agreements. This goes along with other types of texts that the social partners in the European social dialogue jointly produce, such as joint declarations, opinions, frameworks of action, guidelines, etc. (EC, 2004). This, then raises the role of the social partners in implementing the European policies.

2.7.3. The social partners involvement in the Lisbon agenda and the European employment strategy

At the various Councils held in the framework of the Lisbon strategy, the importance of the commitment of all parties concerned with education and training was constantly reaffirmed to achieve the objectives with regard to lifelong education and training (EC, 2002; EC, 2007). Among the key protagonists, it is particularly the social partners (European and national) who play a central role in professional training. The implementation of the principles of LLL implies, in particular, the development of partnerships between the latter and governments (Hasan, 1997). According to a report published by Cedefop (2004), the social partners are not sufficiently involved in the policies and putting them into practice.

One of the questions raised is parallel to the one on the involvement of the social partners in the implementation of the European strategy for employment. Cressey et al. (2007) adopt a relatively critical attitude concerning the nature of the social dialogue as it takes place today and particularly since the introduction of this new method. Whereas the social partners are often presented as being central players, in reality they often remain on the periphery of the process.

They cannot intervene in the definition of the guidelines and objectives and must restrict themselves to participating in the application, within the Member States, of decisions coming 'from above': 'this is a much reduced form of collaboration, where social partners appear to be coopted into a process beyond their influence. They do not participate in the determination of the objective, as "partnership" has been reduced largely to a managerialist façade' (Cressey et al., 2007, p. 20).

These authors point out that the social partners have not been invited to participate in the definition of the objectives relating to the Lisbon Strategy, since it was adopted unilaterally by the Commission and Council of the EU. They are then asked to participate in the implementation of these objectives over which they have not had any influence or control (Cressey et al., 2007).

The role that the social partners can play depends not only on the societal model, on the institutional framework, in which they find themselves, but also on the interest that they have in acting on a European level. It is true that the efforts of the

social partners produce results more easily at national level, where they have more room for manoeuvre (de Boer et al., 2005). Despite this, it would seem that the social dialogue constitutes a central element of the European social model. One only has to cite the example of 2002, during which 243 common declarations were concluded (de Boer et al., 2005).

One can therefore confirm that the social partners find certain advantages in acting at European level and that, despite the obstacles which may emerge in terms of involvement, they do try to exercise some form of influence on European policies (de Boer et al., 2005).

They also undertake concrete initiatives in LLL and VET with the support of European programmes ⁽¹²⁾ such as the Leonardo da Vinci programme, Equal-Adapt, etc. The Commission considers, however, that they should be more involved in matters relating to education and training (Cressey et al., 2007). Chapter 6 explores closer the European social partners' issues.

2.7.4. The European cross-industry social partners and LLL

In the changing economic context of the 1980s, issues about the lack of skills in the workforce arose. Therefore developing a vocational training adapted to the evolving needs of the firms became an important priority that required the intervention of the social partners (Cedefop, Sellin, 1989).

In 1986, the Single European Act gave the Commission the task to develop and promote social dialogue at the cross-industry level. This gave more influence to social partners to develop VET policies and it is actually at the end of the 1980s that joint texts first mentioned vocational training (Cedefop, Bainbridge et al., 2004, p. 59).

The first texts about training developed the idea of the necessity to create a European vocational training system to solve the problem of unemployment and to face the new needs of the firms, consequences of the introduction of new technologies. The essential issues that concerned the social partners were, at the time, the shortages and mismatches of skills that could be improved and updated through an adequate training system. Moreover, the social partners focused on the necessity to be more involved and consulted by the public authorities for training matters (ETUC et al., 1986; 1987).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the social partners developed a more practical and concrete idea of how to implement adequate European training systems. The

⁽¹²⁾ This issue could be subject of further research. So, many examples could be given but, for instance, it can be checked 'Euronaver' project (*Réseau Européen initiatives métier*), a cross-national network supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Euronaver involves UEAPME and focuses on training trajectories. Available from Internet: <http://www.euronaver.net/> [cited 22.9.2008].

social partners insisted on the necessity to create a mutual recognition of qualifications and training, the necessity to reinforce the education and employment of certain target groups (low-skilled workers, younger workers and job-seekers, women, etc.), and moreover the necessity to create links between education and the labour market. To this end, the social partners were willing to contribute to the programmes developed by the Commission and to be supported by Cedefop to help them to meet their demands.

They insisted on the responsibility of public authorities and considered their own role in terms of knowledge of the labour market, especially for the founding of new training systems, for information and counselling and for low-skilled people training (ETUC et al., 1990; 1991a; 1991b).

In 1992, the awareness that the need for worker mobility would develop throughout the decade brought the social actors to think about means establishing transparency and transferability of VET throughout Europe (ETUC et al., 1992). The EU and employers' federations continued to insist on their increasing contribution in education and training policies, notably through the social dialogue and the advisory committee, and the support of Cedefop (ETUC et al., 1993a).

The two joint texts that followed concerned one main action settled in the 1995 *White paper on teaching and learning to combat exclusion*. They insisted of the role of VET to reduce unemployment and especially to support specific target groups such as young people, women and long-term unemployed people (ETUC et al., 1993b; 1995; 1998).

These joint opinions were guidelines or recommendations addressed to European and national authorities and the ideas expressed had a strong influence on the European policies in this field (Cedefop, Bainbridge et al., 2004, p. 59).

While all these joint opinions were mainly addressed to public authorities, the European social partners addressed in 2002 a document to the national social partners. *The framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications* (ETUC et al., 2002) was presented to the Barcelona European Council as a contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy. It identified four major priorities in the field of LLL:

- (a) to identify and anticipate competencies and qualifications needs. To this end, they underlined the necessity to work in partnerships with education and training providers at all levels, develop networks to collect information and exchanges experiences, make use of Cedefop;
- (b) to recognise and validate competencies and qualifications;
- (c) to inform, support and provide guidance;
- (d) to mobilise resources. In relation with this objective, the social partners want to promote co-investment and they insist on the role of public authorities.

The parties agreed to implement the set of priorities via the open method of coordination to promote the frameworks of actions in Member States, taking into account the national practices and at all bargaining levels.

The implementation of the frameworks of action had been evaluated through three follow-up annual reports (ETUC et al., 2003; 2004; 2005) and one final evaluation report (ETUC et al., 2006a) that were presented at the Tripartite Social Summits.

In the 2006 evaluation report, the social partners consider that 'National reports demonstrate that social partners have intensively debated the issue of competence development. This is the case in all Member States. It is nevertheless more difficult to assess follow-up actions in the new Member States as they joined the process only in May 2004. Following on from their commitment expressed in 2002, social partners have taken actions to promote all four priorities, focusing on the areas in which their needs are greater. In accordance with their national needs and practices, employers' and employees' organisations have used different tools to foster the lifelong development of competences and qualifications at national, sectoral and company levels' (ETUC et al., 2006a, p. 5).

The introduction of the framework of actions in the Member States provided an impetus for debate among the national social partners and between social partners and public authorities. Besides, several national initiatives were developed at all bargaining levels in all the Member States. The evaluation reports identify numerous initiatives undertaken in the Member States in the four priorities that they have defined. In the evaluation report of 2006, the key message is that the four priorities remain valid.

At European level, the framework of actions also influenced the work of several sectoral social committees debating about the development of competencies and qualifications (EC 2004a, p. 16; Chapter 6 will examine in details how the sectoral social partners deal with LLL and VET).

In their 2006-08 work programme, the European social partners declare that they intend to discuss another autonomous agreement on either integration of disadvantaged groups on the labour market or LLL. They consider that LLL must remain a priority in a competitive knowledge-based economy and therefore plan to deepen their dialogue on the lifelong development of competences and qualification. (ETUC et al., 2006b).

3. Transversal analysis

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a transversal analysis of all the interviews conducted in the countries, with no specific comparison between the countries or between the sectors. It intends to reflect the responses that the empirical data provide to several transversal questions:

Do social partners have an interest for LLL and VET? How do they approach these issues?

- (a) Do trade unions and employer organisations share common interests in this field?
- (b) Are LLL and VET issues important in the social partners' agenda?
- (c) Are they negotiated and do they give way to collective agreements?
- (d) To what extent are the social partners informed or aware about the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities?
- (e) What are the expectations and needs that they express regarding their role in the context of LLL?

The analysis here is structured along three hypotheses:

- (a) a first hypothesis supposes that LLL is increasingly a subject in the social partners' agenda. In other words, one can anticipate that the social partners pay more and more attention to LLL and VET, which gain in importance in their respective agendas, and are also discussed between employer organisations and trade unions when they negotiate and reach agreements.

If the hypothesis is confirmed, and if LLL and VET have become a topic for social partners, the question that follows immediately is: under what terms? If the social partners cope with LLL and vocational training, do they use notions that are similar to the ones proposed by Cedefop, or do they have their own definition? Beyond the terminology, the problem here is mainly to identify how the social partners define and delimit the training and LLL issues in their own agenda

- (b) as a second hypothesis, one can expect that LLL and VET are fairly consensual issues, which may be easier to discuss and to negotiate than, for instance, wages or working time. However, the analysis will question this hypothesis and examine whether, by contrast, these issues do lead, or not, to diverging positions on employers' and on trade unions' side. Indeed, as Heyes (2007) shows, once they discuss on specific training aspects, such as for

instance the degree of adaptation of skill development to job requirements, the points of view of worker representatives and employer organisations do not necessarily converge;

- (c) finally, the third hypothesis suggests that there may be links between the social partners' agenda and the Copenhagen-Helsinki process, but these links come mostly from 'an emergent process' rather than from a top-down approach (see Chapter 2). There may be similar or even converging objectives, but this does not necessarily stem from formal coordination, in the context of what Hancké (2002) and Marginson and Sisson (2004) call 'convergence without coordination'. The question here is to what extent social partners' agenda in the fields of LLL and VET meets the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities?

The chapter, then, first examines how the interviewees ⁽¹³⁾ approach LLL and VET, looking at the terms they use and the meaning they give to the notions. Second, it focuses on the social dialogue in LLL and VET, analysing to what extent employer organisations' and trade unions' interests do coincide, and then whether they negotiate and reach agreements in the field. Finally, the empirical findings on the social partners' awareness of the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities are presented.

3.2. The social partners' awareness on LLL and VET issues

3.2.1. Social dialogue on LLL/VET: broad definition ⁽¹⁴⁾

First of all, we propose a definition of the social dialogue on LLL/VET to delimitate scope of different analysis presented on the report. Thus, the issue could be broadly defined as all types of negotiation, consultation, information sharing relation among representatives of governments, social partners or, exclusively between social partners at different levels focussing on aspects to promote LLL and/or VET policies mainly aimed to support and/or facilitate employability of workers and companies' competitiveness (Cedefop, Galvin Arribas, 2007).

3.2.2. Terminology: various meanings

How do social partners conceive LLL and training issues? What terms do they use to qualify these issues? How do they delimit the field of LLL and VET when they address the issues: do they include a narrow approach of 'training' as restricted to workers in companies, or do they also consider LLL as such, including educational processes for all types of categories of persons?

⁽¹³⁾ Interviews made per organisation across countries: 30 employers and 50 employees (N=80).

⁽¹⁴⁾ See ILO social dialogue definition on: <http://www.ilo.org>.

At first, for clarification, it is useful to remind the definitions proposed by Cedefop (Box 1). For simplification, however, this chapter will mainly refer to the general terms of 'training' and 'education'.

Box 1. Cedefop's definitions

Vocational education and training

Education and training which aims to equip people with skills and competences that can be used on the labour market.

Adult education

Education provided for adults, often intended for general purposes rather than vocational education.

Lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

Cedefop, Tissot, 2004.

The interviews indicate that the terms used are very diverse, and the social partners rarely refer explicitly to notions of LLL and VET. The terms they most often use are those of 'training', 'continuous training', 'vocational training', and education or 'continuous education'.

Indeed, the social partners use different terms, which come from their own domestic institutional context. When asked about the terms LLL or VET, the respondents consider that these are too long to be really useful in operational discussion. Some also consider that they are connoted terms that induce meanings (polysemic) that, sometimes, do not support (e.g. in Box 2).

Box 2. Using of definitions by the social partners

Some social partners' respondents explicitly stated that they do not use the notion of LLL.

A reason given by a Belgian trade unionist is that the notion places the responsibility of training on the individual rather than on the company, and he prefers to avoid this connotation. Some other in interviewed prefer to use 'life accompanying training' instead of LLL, which has, according to him, a negative connotation in German language, in the sense of a constraint. Additionally, in Ireland, other informant refers to LLL as a notion that is mainly a political concept more than a technical one.

Source: Cross industry and sectoral social partners' respondents from both sides of the industry in Belgium, German and Ireland.

The diversity of terms covers a large range of meanings that vary along the following dimensions:

- (a) the targeted population: in a narrow perspective it covers workers only, whereas in a larger conception it includes all citizens, and particularly job seekers, the unemployed, older workers. The former conception is more frequent in the interviews, particularly in the new Member States;
- (b) the content, which can be seen as having to be strictly in line with the workplace or job, until a larger educational conception focusing on transferable general knowledge;
- (c) the scope of responsibilities, which either involves only companies and workers or, on the other hand, includes educational institutions and public authorities;
- (d) the practical dimensions such as the moment – during or outside working hours – and the process – is training formal or informal, compulsory or not compulsory.

The larger conception, corresponding to the Cedefop's definition of LLL, can be found in the responses in Sweden and Germany, where the social partners refer to the whole education system: from kindergarten to university studies, and all kinds of adult education. In other countries, such as Belgium or France, there is a clearer distinction between basic education and adult education.

In most cases, and particularly in the new Member States, the respondents approach training as delimited within the boundaries of the company, with a focus on workers (Box 3).

Box 3. Different approaches of the social partners dealing with LLL and VET

In several countries, social partners approach LLL and VET in the context of the company and focus on workers. This is the case in Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In some cases, social partners look at LLL and VET as issues which concern workers and jobseekers. Interviews in Ireland and Spain (at cross-industry level), for example, reflect this type of approach. Finally, there are two countries (Germany and Sweden at the cross-industry and sectoral levels), where there is a project on LLL and VET in terms of an integrated approach linking education at large and training.

Source: Extracted and classified from social partners responses at cross industry and sectoral levels.

The interviews show that the terms LLL and VET are not widely spread among the social partners. Moreover, the multiplicity of meanings, ranging from detailed training programmes to a larger strategy concerning both training and education indicates a lack of consensus, on one hand, in the definition and, on the other, in the finality.

3.3. Importance of LLL and VET in social partners' agenda

The respondents agreed largely on the importance of LLL and VET, at the different levels: for companies, sectors or the country. If their answers vary according to the degree of development of training systems in their country and the structure of negotiation in this field, they answer generally acknowledging the fact that training and education have become a necessity, and that it must or should be considered by the social partners, be it for the sake of company competitiveness or for the individual development and employability.

Table 4 gives an indication of the importance that the respondents declare to give to training. The table does not reflect the actual importance they give to training issues in practice: it only reflects what they declared in the interviews.

Table 4. Importance of LLL in the social partners' agenda (N=80)

		Partially important	Has been important for a long time (> 10 years)	Increasingly important
Belgium	Cross-industry Sector		xxx x	xx
Germany	Cross-industry Sector		xx xxxx	
Ireland	Cross-industry Sector		xx	
Spain	Cross-industry Sector			xx xxx
France	Cross-industry Sector	x	xxx x	xxx
Italy	Cross-industry Sector		xx xx	x
Lithuania	Cross-industry Sector	xx		xx xx
Hungary	Cross-industry Sector			x xxxx
Poland	Cross-industry Sector	xx xx		x xx
Romania	Cross-industry Sector			xx xxxx
Slovakia	Cross-industry Sector	xx xxx		xxxxx
Sweden	Cross-industry Sector	x	x x	x x

Legend: x = number of respondents that declared VET/LLL as important in agendas (71)

Analysing the importance that social partners declare to give to training issues in their agenda, three types of situations can be distinguished:

- (a) for a minority of respondents, such as in Lithuania, Poland or Slovakia, training issues are not seen as important in the social partners' agenda. The main reasons for such a situation relate to a weak development of training in general in the country – sometimes because discussions on these issues started only recently – and to the fact that training is considered as the responsibility of single employers and individual employees, on their own initiative.

Indeed, LLL is certainly not considered a key issue in social dialogue. In some cases, procedural obstacles prevent LLL to be considered a key issue. The limited role that a given organisation plays in the field can also be influenced by the lack of financial or human resources, and by the industrial relations framework.

The respondents in such a context often mention the fact that social dialogue in their country focuses on other issues, such as wages, or conflicts between the social partners, to explain their lack of investment in training. Therefore, this cannot be interpreted as a lack of interest in the issue in itself, but rather as a lack of sufficient means to be able to do it.

In such a situation, the players feel the need to concentrate on other issues seen as more crucial, such as workers' fundamental rights, working conditions, respect of the employment contracts, wages, privatisation, health and safety at work. Box 4 gives an illustration of this situation in Italy and Hungary.

Box 4. Importance VET/LLL compared with other issues to negotiate

The most important topic for social dialogue in the Hungarian electricity sector is the system of wages and bonuses. Besides, collective agreements deal mostly with holidays, discount price of company shares available for the employees, the maintaining of the company's rented apartments, sector pension funds, sector health funds, and sector benefit funds that support the victims of workplace illnesses and accidents. The VET system and LLL policies are built up independently from the trade unions. Local chambers of commerce have been given some authority recently in this field but it does not affect trade unions.

Source: Trade unionist responses in electricity in Hungary.

LLL and VET are undoubtedly of great importance for the social partners in the trade sector. Since the early 1990s, they included vocational training in their collective bargaining agenda.

Source: Italian employers' responses in trade sector

- (b) for some respondents in countries like Belgium, France, Ireland or Italy, training has been an important issue over the last 10 or even 20 years, and it is not considered as particularly new. However, respondents agree on the fact

that it remains a topic of importance, but that it is already regulated by law or by collective bargaining, or by both;

- (c) most interviews show that training receives increasing importance, and that it becomes crucial in the current fast-changing socioeconomic context. Several reasons are given to explain the trend. Among these reasons, three main developments are considered as being conducive to new needs:
 - (i) the changes in the economic and institutional context, which increase the necessity to invest in training: technical and legal developments, foreign investments, increasing competition and internationalisation of markets. These increase the need for more and better-organised training. Moreover, respondents also mention the opportunity to access to European funding, European debates on vocational training (Spain and Italy, cross-industry trade union; Romanian social partners), and the need to adapt to EU standards and professional practices (Romania, see Box 5).

Box 5. The need to adapt to EU common criteria's

The accession of Romania made interviewees consider that the opening of the Romanian market and its new position in the European Community have triggered concerns for training. The interviews further show that each organisation has specific objectives concerning professional training. For example, in the chemical industry and telecommunications, a major preoccupation is the preparation of occupational standards that are compatible with European ones, along with the training and certification of lecturers and specialists involved in training sessions.

Source: Romanian social partners

- (ii) other developments take place in the labour market and reinforce the need to invest in LLL. Training is seen as a means to anticipate labour-market changes, such as for instance problems of shortages in specific categories of workers (Box 6). It is also seen as a necessity to reduce unemployment by increasing the skills and qualifications of unemployed people. It is envisaged as necessary in the context of rapid demographic change, to ensure that younger workers will be able to replace the older ones who progressively accede to retirement, and also to replace the workers who leave a given country to go to another EU country with more attractive work conditions. Some see it, finally, as a means to favour the integration of migrant workers (e.g Sweden, trade union in electricity; Ireland, cross-industry employer respondent).

Box 6. Skills shortages in Lithuania

Speaking in general about employers' involvement in the processes of LLL and VET, it is worth noting that surplus labour market with considerably higher labour force supply comparing to labour demand was prevailing in Lithuania, roughly, until 2004. Having no traditions and experience, capital owners/employers cared little about LLL and VET issues: workers with inadequate qualifications would be dismissed and new higher-skilled workers would be employed without any investments into employees' training and qualification improvement. Approximately from 2004 Lithuania started facing evident deficit of labour force (particularly skilled one), and employers have recently paid more and more attention to various social incentives, including employees' training. Accordingly, today, employers identify the issues of LLL and VET as being of particular importance for Lithuanian employers and business, and business competitiveness on the whole.

Source: Lithuanian employers' responses at cross-industry level

- (iii) these changes go along with transformations at the workplace or in the sector. In the changing economic and technological context, sectors and companies change, use more flexibility, reorganise their production methods, increase their demands in terms of productivity and competitiveness, and all this reinforces the need for a qualified workforce. In such a context, the individuals must adapt and develop their skills to reduce the risk of unemployment, or to increase their employability.

Box 7. Sectoral restructuring and the important role of training

The chemical sector in Italy currently has the highest commercial balance deficit among all developed countries. In particular, large and medium-size enterprises that are concentrated in local clusters, so-called chemical poles, currently face a crisis and they undertake a process of restructuring and downsizing, often accompanied by closures and staff redundancies.

As for SMEs, even though they show a fair dynamism, there are persisting difficulties not allowing them to grow and develop. In this context, the role of vocational training is even more important, if one considers diverse characteristics of the sector.

Sources: Trade union responses in the chemical sector in Italy

In all cases, except when LLL is not deemed an important issue, it is essential to underline that the respondents think that it will continue to gain more attention in the near future.

3.4. The social dialogue on LLL and VET issues

The second hypothesis presented in the introduction of this chapter relates to the trade unions and employers' degree of consensus on LLL and VET issues: if these may appear as a rather consensual topic, this does not necessarily lead to consensus. Two questions are useful to examine to what extent the social partners'

positions converge in the field of training: what are the social partners' objectives in this field and do they meet? Are LLL and VET issues on the agenda of collective bargaining and do they lead to collective agreements?

3.4.1. The Social partners' approaching training and LLL: convergent and divergent objectives

Beyond the fact that social partners generally consider training as important or even crucial for worker employability or for company competitiveness, they have different points of view on the priorities and more practical issue. These points of view reflect a divergence of interests between trade unions and employer's organisations when they consider the content but also the cost and the time spent for training.

The interviews show that some of the social partners' objectives largely converge, such as the need to pay increasing attention to company and worker adaptability in a context of structural change, or to enhance skill and qualification levels. In the same way, trade unions and employers' organisations both think that it is crucial to recognise and to regulate training legally with a normative framework, to structure (including at sectoral level), coordinate and support training activities, and to draw up standardised training policies with relevant pedagogical material. Methods, which have to be used to achieve their objectives, include the analysis of future needs, the collaboration or partnership, and the examination of good practice.

Other objectives, by contrast, reflect more diverging views, in particular on the final purpose of training or on the cost of training and who should cover it. In this respect, the trade unions tend to put the focus on personal development and career path, the protection for all against precariousness and social equality and access to education for all, whereas employers' organisations underline the development of individual competencies for company performance and competitiveness, the need of worker's adaptation to job and the need to make initial education closer to company needs. The worker's needs and the regulations in the field of training is, for the trade unions, the main driver of LLL and VET. The employer organisations tend to insist more on company needs. For the trade unions, the cost of training has to be covered by companies and public authorities.

There is obviously a large degree of consensus on the importance of training in a fast-changing technological, economic and social context. Beyond that, however, trade unions and employers do not necessarily have a common interpretation of what they consider prominent. According to the trade unions, the responsibility of training should be taken by the employer or by the State through the education system, whereas employers insist more strongly on the responsibility of the worker in his/her own training process.

On the other hand, employers tend to conceive training programmes as necessarily adapted to market needs, whereas trade unions tend to consider training as an individual right that should be collectively guaranteed, and that must carry personal development for the workers. Training tends to be seen by trade unions as necessarily focused on the transferability of competencies – i.e. not only reduced to the adaptation to job – and viewed as an investment for companies that enables an evolution in the worker' career, be it inside or outside the company.

By contrast, employer organisations tend to consider that informal training within the company should be recognised and, in any case, that training should be focused mostly on the job and comply with company needs. All these aspects are synthesised in Table 5.

Table 5. **Convergence and divergence objectives among the social partners approaching education and training issues**

	Trade unions	Employers organisations
Converging objectives	• need to pay increasing attention to company and worker adaptability; • to enhance skill and qualification levels; • recognise and to regulate training legally with a normative framework; • to structure (including at sectoral level), coordinate and support training activities; • draw up standardised training policies with relevant pedagogical material; • using methods to achieve objectives: analysis of future skills needs, the collaboration or partnership and examination of good practices.	
Divergent objectives	• training to support personal development and career path: evolution of workers inside/outside company; • protection against precariousness: social equality access to education for all; • workers needs and training regulations as key aspects to develop; • responsibility for cost of training: employers and/or by the public authorities; • training collectively guaranteed and allows to facilitate transferability of competences (i.e. not only adapted to job).	• development of individual competences for company performance and competitiveness; • worker's adaptation to job: need to make initial education closer to company needs; • more responsibility of workers to progress on his/her training process; • training programmes as necessarily adapted to market needs; • informal training within company should be recognised and focused mostly on the job and comply to company needs.

Source: Cedefop.

3.4.2. Collective bargaining and collective agreements on LLL and VET

Are LLL and vocational training on the agenda of collective bargaining rounds that lead to collective agreements? If yes, at what level? If no, what reasons can be suggested to explain why? Table 6 presents a synthetic view of the answers collected in the different countries. It is important here to note that the answers, specifically for the sectoral level, do not reflect the overall situation in a given country, since they provide information that is relevant for the sectors covered in the study only, and the situation may differ in other sectors. As the interviews did not concern the company level, the table does not include data on company-specific bargaining and agreements. It also reflects what the interviewees declared in the interviews, not necessarily the actual practice.

Table 6. Interviewees' responses on collective bargaining and texts on LLL and VET per country

Countries	Bargaining and collective agreements	
	Cross-industry	Sectoral
Belgium	x	x
Germany		x
Ireland	x	
Spain	x	x
France	x	x
Italy	x	x
Lithuania	x	
Hungary		x
Poland		x
Romania	x	x
Slovakia		xx
Sweden		x

x Existence
xx Exceptionally

Table 6 shows that training takes place in the bargaining agenda, and is the subject of collective agreements, in most countries under review. Box 8 and 9 provides illustrations from Spain, Lithuania and Ireland.

Box 8. Social dialogue and collective agreements and training

Spain: sectoral agreements in trade sector

In the trade sector, various collective agreements on training have been signed. Each of them lasts in general between three and four years and is legally binding. The last sector-level collective agreement was signed in May 2006, for an unspecified period but with a possibility to end its application. The agreement explains the reasons why a sectoral agreement is essential in this sector, for reasons such as competitiveness in a context of changes or employability and mobility of workers.

In this agreement, LLL includes all the training actions developed by the companies of the trade sector, by the workers or their respective organisations, in the frame of existing regulation (i.e. mainly collective agreements). The objectives of training must be the improvement of competencies and qualifications, as well as the (re)qualification of workers, to improve both company competitiveness and worker individual training. Nevertheless, the consulted employer organisation and trade union respondents have a divergent opinion on the effectiveness of this kind of agreement. Whereas the employer respondent observes a positive evolution of the discussions on training, the trade union representative stated that agreements on training are administrative steps, but do not generate effective training on the field, except for specific sub-sectors.

Source: Spanish sectoral social partners.

Lithuania: social dialogue in VET at cross-industry level

Within the framework of the tripartite agreement signed on 13 June 2005 between the government, employers' organisations and trade unions, the Lithuanian social partners occasionally approve Measure Plans for the Development of Social Partnership of the Government, Trade Unions and Employer organisations. The plan, inter alia, includes a Chapter on 'Information and Education of the Social Partners'. Though the main emphasis of this chapter is placed on the education of the social partners themselves, it also contains measures related to employee training and qualification system.

The Measure Plan for 2007-2008 provides for the following: analysing how employer's expenses for the organisation and implementation of labour market vocational and practical training could be recognised as compensatory employer's costs through tax benefits and target payments; drafting of relevant legislation; organisation of counselling meetings for the representatives of sectoral and territorial employers and employees' organisations on the recognition of regulated professional qualifications in the field of regulated professions in EU Member States; organisation of counselling meetings for the representatives of sectoral and territorial employers and employees' organisations on the issues relating to the development of a uniform and transparent qualification system, covering all levels of qualifications, ensuring interfacing between the levels and diversity of ways for acquisition of qualifications as well as giving the possibility to flexibly respond to the requirements of a changing environment.

Along with social partner's organisations, the Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority has been appointed a responsible executive for the mentioned measures. In addition, during 2006 a law on VET was issued with an active involvement of the social partners.

Source: Lithuania, cross-industry level social partners.

Box 9 shows how tripartite social dialogue has made possible to promote national reforms in Ireland, identifying key issues and target groups to perform on the benefit of the country.

Box 9. Social dialogue on LLL/VET in the context national plans

The Irish National Reform Programme was submitted to the European Commission in October 2005 and brings together the broad range of policies and initiatives at the macro and microeconomic level, the implementation of which aims to sustain Ireland's economic growth and employment performance as its overall contribution to the re-launched Lisbon Agenda over the period to 2008. It sets key priorities in the context of ensuring an integrated approach to addressing skills needs across the education and training sector, addressing barriers to access and progression, the issue of LLL and tackling early school leaving and literacy and numeracy issues.

In this context the high level of outcomes to be achieved within a 10-year framework agreement will be to: enhance early education provision for children from disadvantaged communities and for those with special needs; substantially reduce literacy/numeracy problems among children, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities, and the adult population; encourage children to be active agents in their own learning and to engage in collaborative active learning; strengthen the technical and vocational dimensions of curricula and to embed key skills such as learning to learn and ICT, to develop higher order thinking skills, to diversify and strengthen language learning, to modernise the technology subjects, and to increase the take up of the physical sciences at senior level; drive the LLL agenda by enhancing access to training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher-level qualifications; learning opportunities for adults targeted at vulnerable groups and those in disadvantaged communities with low levels of educational attainment.

Source: Ireland cross industry level social partners informants.

In turn, Box 10 shows how collective bargaining on training in Spain is closely related to the specific socioeconomic context in the country. Changes on the work force related to immigrations patterns seems to be a matter of concern for the Spanish social partners and then, negotiate training provision.

Box 10. The socioeconomic situation in Spain as a key driver to negotiate training provision

Besides the objectives related to training policy at national and sectoral levels, Spanish organisations are aware they have to deal with specific issues that are in line with national particularities. Indeed, two particular phenomena have been observed in recent years: on the one hand, a high level of young people in situation of school drop-out and, on the other hand, the important immigration rate, which has occurred in an intense and fast way.

Accordingly, important issues as under-qualification of the workforce, inadequacy of knowledge or problems of communication have been the subjects of major considerations in collective bargaining.

Source: Spain cross-industry level social partner informants.

By contrast, as showed before, although positive improvements at cross sectoral levels have been done, Lithuania again constitutes a relevant example where social dialogue, in general, is rather feeble and, in particular, increasing training provision at some levels (sectoral) remains as a real challenge (Box11).

Box 11. Availability and characteristics of labour force in Lithuania

According to respondents in Lithuania, a key reason for underdeveloped social dialogue can be found in the fact that since 1990 – year of independence and opening to market economy – and until 2004, the national economy has been functioning with a surplus of labour force. As unemployment rates were high – often exceeding 10% – labour conditions were unfavourable for employees (low wages, inflexible working time, poor social guarantees). The context in general was not supportive of social dialogue and employers' investments into employees.

Source: Lithuania social partners respondents.

There are many reasons explaining why collective bargaining and texts on LLL and VET issues do not take place in the selected countries and sectors. Several factors can be envisaged:

- (a) the collective bargaining structure, which has an impact on where and what one negotiates: one can easily understand that the social partners cannot negotiate on training at a level where they do not negotiate at all;
- (b) the social partners' capacity and strategies: in the new Member States in particular, several respondents underline that they have insufficient resources to negotiate on training, and that they have to focus on what they see as more fundamental or basic questions such as wages or working conditions;
- (c) the socioeconomic challenges that lead the players to be interested in training: the social partners are obviously more interested to negotiate training issues when they jointly identify key challenges in terms of qualifications and competencies, either for workers or for companies;
- (d) the opportunities for investing in training issues, such as the availability of specific funds or bodies in charge of training. If they have weak resources, no specific strategy or objectives in the field, and if they do not see any opportunity that could encourage them to negotiate on these questions, they have no reason to start to discuss in this field.

It is worth noting that no respondent mentioned a difficulty to reach a consensus between trade unions and employers as a crucial obstacle to the conclusion of a collective agreement on training.

In sum, according to the respondents, LLL and VET are not issues that are fully consensual. Nevertheless, the social partners acknowledge the importance – or the increasing importance – of training, and they negotiate and sign texts on these issues.

3.5. The social partners and European issues

The third hypothesis concerns the relationships between the social partners' approach to LLL and vocational training on the one hand, and the European processes on the other, and more specifically the priorities of the Copenhagen Declaration (EC, 2002), the Maastricht Communiqué (EC, 2004) and the Helsinki Communiqué (EC, 2006). The hypothesis here is that there may be links between the social partners' agenda and the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities, but that in such a case they probably come mostly from an emergent process rather than a top-down approach.

3.5.1. Social partners' awareness of European issues

In general, the interviewees would like to be more aware and/or informed on the European processes in the fields of LLL and vocational training because they express a lot of interest on having more information. The priorities of the Lisbon strategy, the Bologna process or the REACH Directive (in the case of the chemical industry) seems to be more known by the social partners than those priorities related to Copenhagen Declaration, the Maastricht Communiqué and the Helsinki Communiqué.

Sometimes they refer more directly to specific points from the content of the Copenhagen-Helsinki process, such as the ECVET, Europass and/or European standards.

Box 12. The social partners and the European processes on education and training

For the German unionist in the road transport sector, 'the strongest European policies influence is European credit system for VET, but the value and the use of this instrument is not clear up to now and should be really developed'.

For a Spanish unionist at cross-industry level, training seems to gain more importance, because among other things of 'the European discourse, of which the Lisbon strategy; this allowed a clarification on the importance of training as a tool of adaptation to contextual changes and to professional precariousness'.

An Irish unionist declares that 'the organisation is aware of the employment strategy, the Lisbon strategy, as well as Bologna'.

Source: Social partners respondents at cross-industry and sectoral levels.

When respondents talk specifically about the Copenhagen priorities as such, they are persons who have been personally involved in the processes at European level, or when they have a particular interest in LLL and VET.

Box 13. The social partners and the European process on education and training

The Hungarian unionist respondent in the electricity sector expressed his motivation to know more how to link national and European-level policy initiatives to boost LLL and VET.

A Belgian representative of the employers observed that 'LLL at European level is particularly important, since a member of the staff has been personally interested in the topic. Consequently, the European level influenced the employers' organisation'.

Source: Social partners respondents at cross-industry and sectoral levels

When they are aware of European education policies, the social partners consider these policies provides a context for their discussions and agreements, but that one cannot speak of an explicit influence as such. Some insist, rather, on the fact the national players also influenced the European policies.

In sum, when the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities are known they mostly are at cross-industry level and this is not in the context of a simple top-down process. Such findings may reflect the existence of work field to be more explored and developed with, among and within social partners' organisations: information and training should be important tools to gain knowledge and raise more awareness on the European processes for the benefit of the social partners.

In the respondents' context, where they give a priority to their own domestic agenda, which is circumscribed by the national system of industrial relations, and where their interest for training and European issues also depend on their strategies, capacity and resources.

If the social partners declare that they are not explicitly so much aware of the Copenhagen- process, this does not mean, however, that there are no relationships between their agenda and the European priorities. But then the relationships must be considered as emergent, that is, not related to formal top-down coordination. Do, then, the main issues mentioned by the organisations match with the European objectives?

Parts of the social partners' objectives and agenda in the field of training correspond to the Copenhagen process. Indeed, recognition of competencies and training, responsiveness to the needs of the labour market, exchange of methods and/or certification of training, are topics that are mentioned by the interviewees.

The respondents do not directly cope with the topic of quality of LLL, but the issue appears indirectly, through concerns for the practical consequences of training, such as workers' employability and evolution, competitiveness of companies and sectors.

Box 14. The social partners' objectives and agenda in the field of training

Representative of a Slovak employers' organisation mostly emphasised the need for enhancement in access to information, transparency in competences and qualifications and their recognition across the EU Member States. Thus, according to this respondent, future development at European level should copy the European standards in European qualification sectors (EQS) and European qualifications framework (EQF), making them transparent and the programmes for their acquisition in individual sectors accessible in all European countries. An Italian representative of employers explained that "the issues discussed are mainly the regulation of apprenticeship contracts and the development of continuing vocational training, with specific reference to the activities of the Interprofessional Funds. Other issues also included in the agenda, although less relevant in the debate, are the following: identification and anticipation of skills needs; recognition of competences and qualifications; acknowledgment of training institutions".

Source: social partners cross-industry respondents.

Some aspects of European policies are exceptionally raised by interviewees, such as objectives focused on tools – for example the ECVET, the EQF – or on guidance. For instance, interviewees did not wonder how could European institutions support Member States in organising LLL and VET systems.

Other issues may differ from the Copenhagen priorities, such as practical questions that preoccupy the social partners: who should be trained, workers or unemployed people? When should training take place, during or outside working hours? How to motivate the stakeholders to consider training a very important topic and how to stimulate employers and employees to invest in training?

3.5.2. The social partners' needs and requirements in the context of the Copenhagen process on education and training

The synthesis here does not examine whether or not the needs and requirements are relevant or realistic, it only presents the empirical results stemming from the 80 interviews conducted with national and sectoral players.

On one hand, the social partners express several procedural needs related to the processes organising training policies. To some extent, they all refer to demands for closer relationships between the European processes and the social partners at all levels:

- (a) in general, the interviewed social partners expressed that it would be recommendable to continue working on adapting the approach more closely to the national or sectoral realities. The cross-national coordination of training policies has been mentioned, as a way to strengthen the European dimension in the field of training;
- (b) in this respect, the social partners respondents expressed the need to continue working associating the European social partners in the processes: these could

play a role to improve the connections between the European policies and the national and sectoral players;

Box 15. The perceived usefulness of exchanging experiences between social partners

Organisations often mention their wish to share common references and to exchange experience between countries of the EU, but generally with countries that are similar from their point of view (e.g. where there is a similar training system, where the same language is spoken) and on very practical aspects.

'[...] an exchange of experience would be welcome, between small groups of Belgian and French nurses for instance, on precise topics, well prepared, interesting for the workers. The result of this kind of short-term exchanges would be more beneficial than long discussions on systems'.

Source: Belgium, cross-industry trade union respondent.

- (c) the social partners are willing to be more aware on European issues and underlined on the importance of simple, clear and up-to-date information, which should be concrete, operational and easy-to-use for practitioners (it should also be, preferably if possible, translated in different languages). In addition, they find that exchange of information and experience working approaches are the most useful for them;
- (d) the interviewed social partners would find very useful to join a proactive action by European institutions, towards the social partners, with direct contacts with national and sectoral level players;
- (e) some of them would find for increased promotion of LLL and education and training all over Europe to heighten awareness;
- (f) some interviewees also mention the need for funding for projects led by the social partners.

On the other hand, several needs and requirements formulated by the respondents are of a substantive nature, and directly concern the contents of training policies:

- (a) there are demands of clarification of the meaning of key concepts;
- (b) they ask for support or help in the recognition of qualifications and competencies through, for instance, the development of common principles for certification or for validation of informal learning;
- (c) many of them are confronted to the difficulty to identify and anticipate skills needs, and they are interested in support in this field;
- (d) worker mobility induces difficulties, particularly in some countries (e.g. Spain and Romania), and the social partners are interested in support to approach this issue to identify the challenges that it raises for their domestic labour market and in terms of skills and competencies.

Box 16. The key mission of Cedefop as a link to European and national levels

'it is important for the national-level social partners that Cedefop plays a real and effective role with regard, for example, to the issues of identification of skills needs, recognition of competences and qualifications, on which there is a certain degree of vagueness even at the European level. Although in recent years Cedefop has undoubtedly increased its role, it should continue influencing on the European processes and contributing on providing links to better understanding among social partners organisations across European countries. The linguistic problems is a real barrier and the clarification of the meaning of key concepts such as 'skill', 'competence', and 'qualification', etc.'

Source: Italy, cross-industry employers' representative.

If respondents do not express any needs or requirements, this is mainly when they have a partial knowledge of European policies, or when they consider their domestic training system is well developed at national and sectoral level and does not need European intervention.

In the new Member States in particular, there are also organisations where the scarce resources are concentrated on domestic needs and do not allow investing in European affairs. In this latter case, the respondents find difficult to set up relationships with the European level.

4. The national comparison

The purpose of this section is to highlight the national specificities of the social partners when they tackle with LLL and VET issues considering their national context.

Indeed, the overarching hypothesis is that the involvement of social partners in training issues is influenced by their own national and institutional context. Accordingly, one can expect that how the actors in each country conceive and deal with training issues differs from a country to another. At first, this chapter examines how the actors who were interviewed conceive the notions of VET and LLL and it analyses how the historical context of each country weights on their approach of these questions.

If the data show a widespread interest for training in each country, the social partners' role differs from one country to another, according to the specific organisation of the traditional education system and to the respective social partners' role in each industrial relations system.

The precedent chapter has shown that most respondents do not clearly identify and differentiate the various European processes and that few of them are really aware of the Copenhagen and Helsinki processes. A closer look to the national differences in this chapter will nuance this statement by showing how degrees of awareness vary across countries.

4.1. Different definitions on LLL and VET throughout Europe: three major groups

As previous chapter showed, the social partners use various terms to name the concepts of LLL and VET. The comparison of national responses shows that the social partners in each country have their own definition and own terms, which are linked to each national context.

The interviews indicate an obvious link between the organisation of the traditional educational system, its degree of development and the scope of what social partners consider as education or training in each national context. According to this, it can be clustered three groups of countries corresponding to the various definitions of education and training.

Group 1: Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

In the new Member States represented in the research sample, most of the respondents admitted they do not know the terms 'LLL', which appear as a new concept for them.

How they define training then corresponds rather to objectives defined in the framework of the current socioeconomical changes than to larger educational concerns. The social partners interviewed consider training as a response to the need of a more qualified labour force in line with the recent technological evolutions and the necessity to be competitive in the European market.

Box 17. The continuing training; key domain for the social partners

'The reforms in the sector has brought many challenges and it is affecting the competitiveness of the Romanian electricity sector. The continuous professional training aims at preparing employees to face technological changes occurring in the sector'.

Source: Romanian trade unionist in electricity sector.

Group 2: Belgium, France, Spain and Italy

In these countries, the educational system is organised with a clear differentiation between education, which is generally considered as the responsibility of the national authorities, and training, viewed as being in the realm of the social partners.

Training is defined here, as all educational activities taking place after school, as a mean to achieve adult personal development, or as a mean to adapt workers qualifications to the evolution of their job.

Box 18. The education and training as a tool developing personal and professional life

'the terms used are those of continuous professional training (*formation professionnelle continue*), which are contrasted with the terms of initial training referring to training [...] leading to access to employment and to adaptation to the job'

Source: French informant from employer organisation in the electricity sector.

'Cultural capital is a key factor for persons to develop as both individuals and workers. Furthermore, it gives them more power in negotiations within labour relations'

Source: Italian cross-industry trade unionist.

These definitions are thus linked closer to the notions of VET as they are defined in the Copenhagen declaration. However, there are some countries where

the educational system has been built on a LLL perspective and the respondents view training on this basis.

Group 3: Germany and Sweden

In Sweden, adult education is deeply rooted in an educational tradition lasting since the beginning of the 20th century (Askling and Foss-Fridlitzius, 2000; Ericson, 2005). In this system, the distinction between initial education and vocational training is not clear and education is seen as going from kindergarten, school and university to adult education or training in companies, until the end of life.

In Germany, although to a lesser extent, education is also assimilated to LLL in the broad sense, and the social partners are involved in the development of a stronger initial educational system, which they consider essential to improve workers employability.

Box 19. Perceptions about LLL meanings

'LLL covers what we learn in our everyday life from schools, colleagues, courses, [...] whereas vocational training covers only the competences we need to do a job'. At cross-industry level, the respondent answered that '[our organisation] uses the term LLL more frequently than VET. LLL is defined as the whole education system from kindergarten up to university studies but it covers also courses provided by employers to their employees and all kind of adult education'.

Source: Swedish trade unionist in the trade sector.

On the stated that 'LLL starts with early-child education. All talents and abilities of a person should be recognised and promoted very early'.

Source: German employer representative.

It has been notice that in some countries, when asked about the objectives of their organisation in the field of LLL or vocational training, some respondents answer by talking about training for their own delegates or members (e.g. trade union officials or representatives on trade union side; member companies on employer side in Belgium, Poland and Slovakia).

4.1.1. A difficult compromise whereas positive achievements

The precedent chapter showed that trade unions and employer' organisations do not necessarily agree on the scope of training. To put it simply, employers generally link training to their needs and thus to the adaptation of the workers to the evolution of the technologies and work organisation, whereas trade unions tend to see the importance of training as a means to ensure workers employability and social cohesion.

While in some countries, these differences of objectives may be a subject of dissension between employers and trade unions, the French social partners have reached a consensus on these issues (Box 20 presents the details of the individual right to training, jointly decided by the social partners).

Box 20. Example on consensus: the last reform of the French training system

Le droit individuel à la formation (DIF)

The last reform of vocational training in France initiated a new concept: *droit individuel à la formation* (individual right to training). What French respondents call the DIF was initiated by the national intersectoral agreement of 2003 on the employees' access to LLL and by the law of 2004 on LLL and social dialogue. Every employee with a permanent contract and with minimum one year of tenure within the company is entitled to follow 20 hours of training per year, with a maximum of 120 hours training for 6 years, on his or her own initiative, with the agreement employer's consent.

A sectoral agreement can provide that training takes place during working hours, but in the absence of such an agreement, the employee will train after working hours with a benefit paid by the employer.

The individual right to training constituted a compromise between two conceptions of the individual right: on one side, the employee is responsible for maintaining his or her competences and employability; on the other side, it is seen as a means for the employee to progress in his or her career despite unemployment periods (Merle, 2004).

The individual right for training was then considered within the 2003 agreement as a co-initiative from both the employee and the employer. This was like an intermediary type of training between those imposed by the employer and those taken at the employee initiative.

Three different types of training were distinguished in the law of 2004. At first, training followed by the employee, with the objective to ensure his or her adaptation to the job, is considered as part of working time and then involves the payment of wage by the employer. If the objective of training is linked to the general evolution of the jobs, training is followed during the working hours, with some exceptions if the courses need to be pursued after agreed working time.

If the training aims at the employee skill development, it will be followed after working time, except if a sectoral agreement forecasts training during working hours, with the payment by the employer of a benefit that corresponds to 50% of the salary. This training period became thus independent from the employment contract because the benefit linked to it is not considered as a formal wage. If the employers obtained that a significant part of training is followed after working time, the trade unions obtained the transferability of the right to training in case of redundancy, insisting on its autonomy from the employment contract. Training has thus become an individual right, initiated by the employee itself as an integrated part of his or her professional life (Favennec-Héry, 2004).

France is obviously not the only country where broad agreements about vocational training have been concluded, but this example is interesting because it illustrates the compromise between the two contrasted visions about vocational training.

Source: Summarised and completed with French social partners responses from both sides of the industry.

Other countries have been tested as good examples of social harmony on education and training. For instance, in Spain as well, large national agreements have reformed the entire training system in 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2006. In Belgium, training is also part of the intersectoral discussions that take place every two years and that result in wide-ranging agreements.

The role of continuing vocational training has also been recognised through the framework of the large Italian cross-industry agreements, which involved an important number of social and public actors.

4.2. The weight of the national context influencing the social partners' role

As education and training are considered in different ways throughout Europe, the involvement of the social partners in a given country is likely to differ from the situation in the others. The social partners' role depends on national specificities such as the institutional context, the organisation of the educational system, the industrial relations system, as well as from country-specific political and economic issues.

4.2.1. The European education and training systems

In each country, the traditional organisation of the educational system defines the scope of what is considered as education and what is considered as training, and also influences the role that the social partners can play in it.

To illustrate the weight of the institutional system and, specifically, the role played by the social partners in each system, it is useful to come back to Verdier's typology of the European education systems (Verdier, 2007). His typology shows how the social partners' initiatives are constrained by normative and cognitive societal specificities related to each educational system. It aims at illustrating the main differences between the various models and provides a strong support to explain the diverging situations that one finds in how the social partners conceive their role in training issues.

Box 21. The academic model (France)

The national authorities (*l'éducation nationale*) are competent in the delivering certification and diplomas testifying the qualifications obtained and their recognition on the labour market. The social partners play a limited role in the recognition of competences, acting rather as advisers. However, in-company training is regulated through interactions between the government, trade unions and management, and joint bodies manage implementation of provisions (Verdier, 2007)

Source: Contrasted with social partner responses from both sides of the industry.

In the academic model, the educational performances depend on economic influences. These performances are certified by internal rules and diplomas testified by the public authority. The qualifications acquired and recognised by a formal

diploma are then valid and recognised on the labour market. In this type of system, the social partners generally play a consultative role regarding initial education, whereas they are more involved in training after school. The French case is a good illustration of the academic model (Box 21).

In the corporatist model, there is no hierarchy between different study levels and the competences of an employee are measured according to his or her capacity to occupy a given job. The qualification standards are determined according to the needs of the labour market. The social partners, who are then closer to market needs than in the academic model, are significantly involved in the determination of qualification standards. For Verdier (2007) Germany is a case of the corporatist model (Box 22).

Box 22. The corporatist model (Germany)

The German dual system of education alternates training in companies and vocational training at school with training programmes tailored from the needs of the labour market. Both trade unions and management are involved in the regulation of the system defining the training standards (Heidemann, 2000). This is illustrated by a German respondent, who explains that the issues discussed in social dialogue, such as for instance the recognition of qualifications, are practical and technical matters that are specific to the region's and a sector's needs.

Source: German respondent from a sectoral employer organisation.

In the universalistic model, education is considered in a LLL perspective, based on a solidarity conception that intends to reduce social inequalities. Public authorities are then primarily in charge of regulating the education, with an aim to give a second chance to adults who did not have the opportunity to get sufficient initial education. Education and training are not distinguished from each other and the social partners' involvement is only restricted by the necessity to offer the same opportunities to all citizens. Sweden corresponds to such a universalistic model (Box 23).

Verdier adds two other models in his more recent typology of 2007. One is the market regime, which is found in the UK only. The last model corresponds to the public-private network regime where the market plays a predominant role in the regulation of the education system and in the recognition of the competences but, by contrast to the market oriented model, the public authorities intervene to guarantee the availability and the reliability of the information and to give everyone equal opportunities on the 'educational market'.

According to Verdier, most of the European models currently evolve towards this last model, albeit they follow the path of their traditional systems.

Box 23. The universalistic model (Sweden)

The Swedish educational system makes no distinction between vocational training and general education. There are thus no specific schools dedicated to vocational training within the school system.

The School Act (Skollagen 1985:1100) and the Municipal Adult Education Ordinance (Förordningen 1992:403 om kommunal vuxenutbildning) are the legal basis for continuing vocational training (CVT) in the public school system for adults. These rules impose to municipalities to provide upper secondary adult education. The school boards benefit from large responsibilities and they decide which courses have to be offered. Most of the time, schools and social partners cooperate to develop the course programmes in accordance with the needs of the industry (Cedefop, Abrahamsson, 1999).

For instance, in the electricity sector, the social partners decide via collective bargaining what knowledge an electrician should have to get employed, what kind of training the companies should give to employees or trainees

While the issues discussed by the sectoral organisations are very concrete matters, the role of the cross-industry organisations consists in trying to influence the government and parliament to convince them of the importance of education for the economy, the need to offer a second chance to adults who did not get the opportunity to go to school, and to offer the possibility for all to get access to higher education. Training is considered a key factor resulting in increased equality, and there is a general consensus on the importance of training for all.

Source: Sweden, trade union respondent.

Concrete examples from the interviews illustrate the weight of the different models on the objective mentioned by the actors:

- (a) in France, for instance, the social partners play an important role in the decision-making process. However, the intersectoral agreement is fully effective only when transposed in a law. At sectoral level, the respondents particularly consider as their current key priority the need to adapt and to implement the priorities settled in the law;
- (b) if legal texts can determine the content of the actors' agenda, as is the case in France, laws can also determine the absence of vocational training priority in the social partners' agenda. This is illustrated by the Polish case. In Poland, laws on trade unions define what matters are managed by the trade unions, and this does not include LLL or VET. The priorities generally expressed by Polish trade unions consist in improving the working conditions, wage level, working time and respecting labour legislation.

As is clear in the Polish case, laws regulating the educational system are not the only ones to define the scope of action of the social partners in the fields of LLL and vocational training. It is also important to consider the organisation of industrial relations because it defines the weight of the social actors in the decision-making processes and determines the most determinant level of negotiation.

4.2.2. The weight of the industrial relation systems

The social partners' role in decisions, management and implementation of training systems generally follows the framework of collective relations in place in each

country. The interviews reflect four types of processes in the countries. Each country has different means to conduct collective relations and can have more than one process.

4.2.2.1. A permanent discussion in a specific body

In this case, training is subject to discussion between trade unions, employers' organisations and public authorities more generally, in tripartite bodies:

- (a) in Spain, for instance, the social partners play an important advisory role in the national tripartite council for continued training in employment, where they share their responsibilities with the Ministry of labour and social affairs. The social partners are organised at all levels of industrial relations and numerous links exist between the different levels. The Spanish social partners have also an important role in organising and managing LLL activities and training funds. This is also the case in Belgium, France and Italy;
- (b) the Romanian social partners seem to be active in a tripartite structure as well: the national council for the professional training of adults (CNFPA) promotes strategies for professional training of adults, acts as a national authority for qualification, initiates and carries out a series of project funded by Europe. At national level, the social partners conclude collective agreements including chapters regarding LLL. At this level, negotiations concern general issues that will be adapted in sectors via sectoral negotiations and implemented in companies. Nevertheless, according to many Romanian respondents, the national training strategies seem to exist only on paper, and some sectors have developed their own strategy only;
- (c) in Ireland, FÁS (*Foras Áiseanna Saothair*) is the Irish training authority managed by the social partners and the government. Collective agreements are essentially concluded at the national level and consist in tripartite agreements, not binding but based on a voluntaristic approach;
- (d) in France, social partners have an important consultative role in a tripartite body called the national council for professional lifelong learning (*Conseil national de la formation professionnelle tout au long de la vie*) where the government has an arbitration role.

4.2.2.2. Cross-industry collective bargaining

Training here is part of discussions and negotiations in the formal framework of bipartite bargaining between cross-industry employers' organisations and trade unions, which results in collective agreements:

- (a) in Italy, LLL and VET negotiations at the cross-industry level takes place in the framework of wide-ranging interconfederal agreements. Cross-industry funds

set up the role and responsibilities of each of the partners, in which public authorities and social partners play parallel roles. At sector-level, social partners negotiate industry-wide agreements, which include LLL provisions, whereas few agreements concern this matter at company level. Through the funds, the social partners jointly manage initiatives in vocational training, but according to the interviews such a partnership only exists on paper, since few agreements are finally signed between the partners;

- (b) in Belgium, like in Italy, vocational training is discussed through the framework of cross-industry agreements concluded every two years. Agreements including LLL provisions are also negotiated, to a lesser extent, in sectors and companies, but these agreements in any case have to respect the framework of the national texts. The overall responsibility about VET is shared between the different levels of power – federal and regional authorities – and the social partners;
- (c) in France as well, agreements are concluded and followed in bipartite committees at the cross-industry level, and then at sectoral level within joint bodies: *comité paritaire national pour la formation professionnelle* [National joint Committee for vocational education and training] and *comités paritaires nationales pour la formation et l'emploi* [National joint Committees for training on employment]. The sectoral social partners are then entitled to conclude a sectoral agreement adapted to the needs of the sector, and companies are entitled to implement this agreement or to negotiate their own agreement in the works council.

4.2.2.3. Collective bargaining at sectoral and territorial level

The interviews conducted with Swedish social partners indicate that the Swedish educational system has undergone important changes over the last few years, with the decentralisation of responsibilities, while education providers were given more autonomy to organise themselves. Social partners, however, have the possibility to intervene at national level to define the course programmes that would be vocationally oriented. Training is negotiated nationally in the sectors, each sector establishing suitable training provisions to their company needs. The agreements and joint opinions cover general issues, establishing a framework for the companies' agreements and also involve certifications. The company's works council discusses the training plan of the company through a yearly dialogue. Finally, at local level, they cooperate with schools, within vocational councils or programme councils, to define training programmes.

Comparatively, Germany is more decentralised than Sweden, and collective agreements take place at the regional level. Cross-industry organisations, however, publish common standpoints.

4.2.2.4. Exclusively discussed at companies or not part of discussions

In some countries training is part of the prerogatives of the companies, and the existence of discussions between the social partners at this level depends on the company-specific practice. Such a situation exists in countries where collective bargaining is decentralised at the lower level, or where social dialogue at higher level is weak, or else where training is not at the social partners' agenda at sectoral and national level:

- (a) in Lithuania no bipartite agreements are signed at the national level, very few sectors conclude collective agreements, and in parallel the issues of LLL or vocational training are only addressed in some enterprises. Formally, the tripartite agreement of 13 June 2005, included few measures aiming to develop a vocational training and qualification improvement system and create LLL opportunities. Moreover, the social partners are formally involved in working groups preparing draft laws or giving their opinions in a tripartite council. But actually, according to the interviews, the impact of the social partners is very small, and most of the time the representatives from trade unions or employers federations do not know much about the issues at stake or do not even participate in these groups;
- (b) in Slovakia, training is discussed between employers and trade unions at company level. However, bargaining on the issue seems to be rare, and there are no real negotiations and no agreements. According to the interviews, employers often consider training as a matter that should be dealt with exclusively by management;
- (c) in Hungary, the interviewees consider that LLL and VET systems develop independently from the industrial relations system. Recently the Chambers of Commerce and Industry obtained some responsibilities in the field. Discussions at company level, especially in large public firms such is the case in postal services, and in large private companies with a strong trade unions presence, may happen.

An Hungarian respondent in the chemical industry provided evidence about the existence of a tripartite body, the National Vocational Training Council, where social partners are consulted about the curricula, study programmes and the qualifications needs. Another one, at cross-industry level, mentions the creation of steering committees including representatives of employers and employees, to supervise VET issues within the first National Development Plan (2004-07).

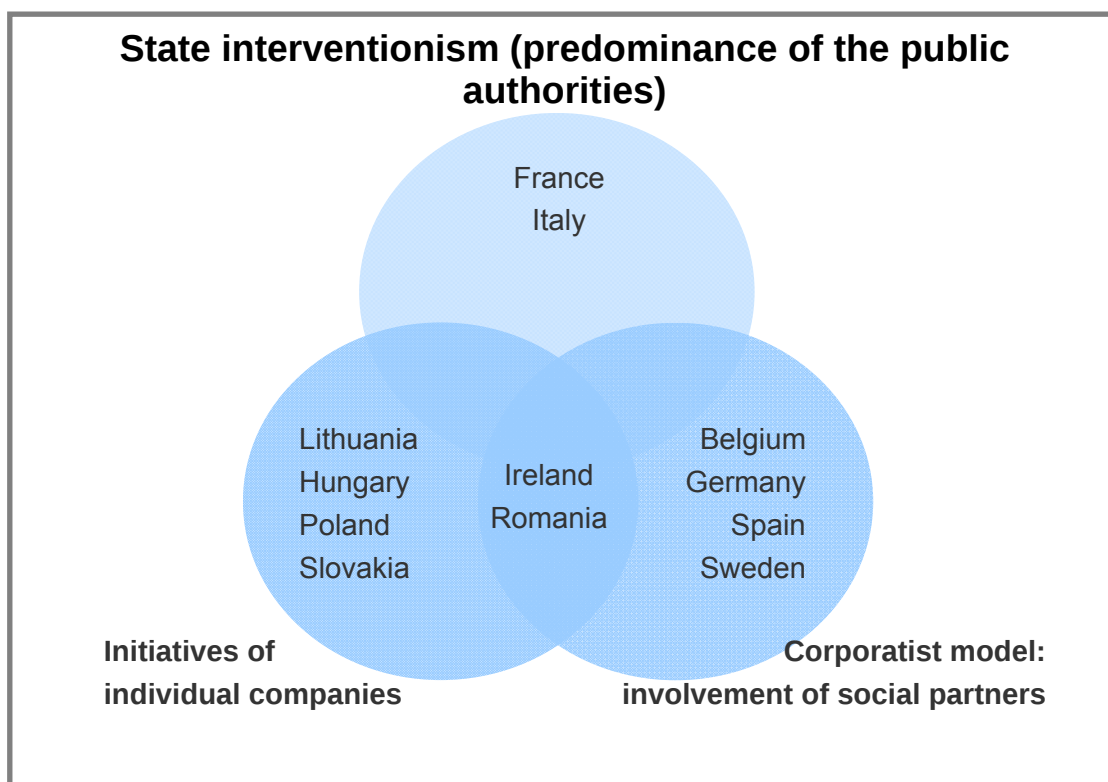
But the respondents do not see clear concrete outputs resulting from these bodies;

- (d) in Poland, vocational training or LLL does not appear to be part of discussions and negotiations between employers and trade unions, except in specific sectors, such as the chemical industry. The matters discussed essentially focus on working conditions, wages and safety.

By contrast, countries such as Belgium, Germany, Spain or Sweden, considered as corporatist models in industrial relations and for some of them in the education system, leave, to some extent, a great autonomy to their social actors in the education and training fields.

Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, as we already considered, have few regulations in the field of training, which is more the responsibility of individual employers rather than that of collective bargaining.

Figure 1. **Ideal types of social partners' involvement on LLL/VET issues at national level**



Ireland and Romania can be seen as an intermediary case. In Ireland, training is a tripartite competency shared between the State, employer organisations and trade unions, which define a general framework for companies. In Romania, national institutions for training are formally established, but it seems that national strategies

are not translated into effective strategies in some sectors. In sectors not concerned by such strategies, training then remains in the realm of competencies of the individual employer.

Figure 1 considers each country as part of 'ideal-types' according to their educational system and according to their industrial relations framework. As mentioned earlier, France, as a part of the academic model, and Italy, with the legislating role of public authorities in social matters, could be considered as part of a State interventionist model in which the action of social partners, in terms of education and training, are limited by the action of the public authorities. This graph does not intend to represent the exact practice but, rather insists on the predominant actors playing a leading role in training issues.

4.2.3. The influence of the current political and economical situation

In each actor's agenda, current economic or social challenges are determining for training issues. These challenges, in turn, take place in a general context of globalisation, technological change and an ageing European population.

At first, most respondents envisage the contents of their agenda and their objectives in terms of training in relation with rapid technological change, with the aim to adapt the labour force to these changes and with the objective to be competitive in the European context. The new Member States, particularly, experience, over the last few years, a lack of highly qualified workers. The respondents in those countries, therefore, become aware of the necessity to train their labour force to higher competencies to support economic development and to become more competitive in the European economy.

As newcomers, the Romanian social partners insisted particularly on their concern to adapt and harmonise their occupational standards to European ones.

The importance of LLL or training also depends on specific socioeconomic problems. This is the case for instance in Ireland, Spain and Sweden, which have to face a massive increase of migrant workers and the difficulty to recognise or compare workers qualifications. Current demographic changes and the significant increase of senior workers question the training strategies of social partners in EU-15 countries, such as Germany, France and Ireland.

Finally, it is clear that the social partners' role does not only depend on their own initiative and strategy, but is much influenced by their institutional context, and specifically by the educational system and the national system of collective bargaining. If their scope of action in their own national context is determined by national specificities, then one may expect that the extent to which they are interested in European policies concerning training differs, due to their national situation but also to their own relationships with the European sphere.

4.3. The national social partners' awareness of European processes

The degree of awareness of the different processes varies from a country to another. From the interviews, two groups may be differentiated according to the degree of 'Copenhagen awareness' and the perceived relationships between the European processes and the domestic agendas in the fields of LLL and VET.

The distribution of countries clearly shows a differentiation between former EU-15 countries and the new Member States in terms of degree of information, access to information, and use of information in the domestic agenda. In the former group including EU-15 countries, it can be distinguished, in turn, countries with no long-established LLL tradition (Ireland and Italy) and other countries with a long-established LLL tradition (Belgium, Germany, Spain France and Sweden). This aspects are classified and explained below.

4.3.1. EU-15 countries with a recent LLL tradition

In countries where a training culture is rather recent (e.g. Ireland and Italy), the European concepts appear as having an indirect influence on the first initiatives to develop training systems. The interviewees here consider that Europe provided the idea and a context to develop such initiatives, and they acknowledge that there was a direct influence from the European guidelines, which were adapted to the national context and in the limits defined by the domestic institutions (Box 24).

Box 24. Ireland and Italy highlights

In Ireland, the idea to develop a training system emerged at first throughout the 1990s along with the development of the first training strategies at the European level. These strategies provided a context for the Irish reform. Additionally, European funds helped to develop some projects. The establishment of FÁS, the national training authority, is considered as directly inspired from the European objectives, while the national framework of qualifications inspired by the EQF.

In Italy, the European processes played a significant role throughout the 1990s in stimulating, at national level, a debate on vocational training, and some respondents acknowledge that the concept of 'partnership' in the management of training funds finds its roots in the European strategies.

Source: Responses of social partners at cross-industry level.

4.3.2. EU-15 countries with a long term LLL tradition

In countries where a training tradition is present and where a national framework has been established for years (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Spain, France and Sweden), the social partners tend to consider they are well ahead regarding the guidelines proposed by the European institutions. Here it is much more delicate to

assess what the real impact the European policies is and where the first initiative comes from. It can be seen as a 'chicken and egg' situation, as some respondents themselves qualified the situation, which means that these respondents think initiatives from their own domestic context have influenced the European policies which, in turn, had an impact on national situations.

Most of the time, priorities corresponding to the concepts defined in the Copenhagen Declaration can be found in the social partners agenda, but the players themselves are not consciously aware of their application at a European level. When aware of it and when new concepts have been adopted, the respondents said they 'pick what they need' or what they want in the 'European basket'.

Box 25. **Belgium and Sweden highlights**

'European policies in the field of training brought few new elements for us, and these issues were already addressed in Belgium since the 1980s. However, for some aspects, we do not know anymore if they developed it because we found them in the European strategies, or if they first came in the domestic context and, afterwards, were considered as part of European strategies. It is a kind of a 'chicken and egg situation (one does not know which comes first)'

Source: Belgian trade unionist at cross industry level.

'We have already good systems in terms of training and when we are informed about new European policies in the field, we are looking to policies that could be adapted to our model and we pick what we want to implement'.

Source: Swedish employer organisation at cross industry level.

However, it is important to note that most respondents stated the European objectives are a matter for national governments rather than social partners, and besides the cross-industry organisations are generally more concerned by European affairs, whereas sectoral organisations remain focused on their own specific problems.

4.3.3. The new Member States and the LLL issues in the light of the Copenhagen process

If respondents from former EU-15 countries indicate, from their point of view, there is still a lot of room to improve awareness on the European processes, the situation is still more evident in the new Member States, where the social partners perceives that would like to be more involved and informed about European process, or they simply do not have the proper resources and to be more involved in training issues.

Box 26. Awareness of European processes on education and training/LLL in the new Members States

In Lithuania, respondents explain their relative awareness for the European processes in the field of training by a general weakness of social dialogue in their country and by a lack of resources and time to pay attention to LLL and European issues.

In Slovakia, training issues are mostly present at the company level and organisations perceive the EU institutions only through the prism of the European funds and sometimes via their European counterparts. In general, the respondents consider that their organisations should be more informed about the processes at play. In Poland, respondents point to have more information as well, but some organisations' objectives correspond anyway to European objectives.

Hungary faces the same problems, but apparently to a lesser extent. At national level, respondents consider that some impulse comes from European guidelines but more generally via the national authorities. In specific sectors, such as chemicals, the link between the European organisations and their national members are more obvious.

Source: Social partners respondents in mentioned countries from both sides of the industry.

The preoccupations of the EU-10 social partners, and this is also valid for EU-15 countries, can be related to the objectives mentioned in the Copenhagen Declaration. The social partners' objectives in the new Member States often echo those from EU-15 countries. This is the case, for instance in the following matters: adapting occupational standards, raising awareness of the importance of training, developing training quality criteria, developing workers' mobility through common qualifications and funds. Nevertheless, the convergence of preoccupations cannot be considered as deliberate. It is, rather, a case of convergence without coordination (Hancké, 2002).

5. The sectoral comparison

This chapter intends to highlight the sector-specific social partners positions in the context of LLL in the sectors under study address (¹⁵). The chapter examines, first, the context of industrial relations in the different countries, because it is important to be aware of the respective roles and positions that sector-level social partners have in the different countries since their role in their specific industrial relations system determines how they can cope or not with vocational training and with European issues.

Second, the analysis focuses on the social partners' approach of LLL and VET: do social partners at cross-industry and sector level share the same priorities in the field of LLL and VET? The data indicate that there is a different approach at these two levels, with a broader understanding of LLL at cross-industry level, whereas the sectoral social partners tend to focus rather on vocational training, which is envisaged from companies' and workers' point of view.

Third, the differences between the sectors are examined: does the approach of training issues differ from one sector to another? The answer here is positive, with sector-specific concerns related to the particular technological, social and economical changes social partners have to face in each branch.

This leads to questions on the relationships between the sectoral social partners and the European policies: do these relationships vary across sectors? The sixth section investigates the relationships with European policies. Overall, the interviews point to a need to increase visibility of the European affairs for the sector-level players in general, without any clear differentiation from one branch to another. This, in turn, highlights the prevalence of the national context over sectoral logics, with no clear cross-border similarities in a given sector across the different countries.

5.1. The context: the relative role of sector-level social partners

The relative importance of sector level industrial relations varies from one country to another and it is an important element of the context that one must keep in mind

(¹⁵) Analysed interviews per sector: N=87.

when approaching the social partner's role and expectations in the field of LLL and VET.

Table 7 gives an indication of the relative importance of sectoral collective bargaining in each of the countries. It reflects the role of sector-level social dialogue in the field of wage bargaining only, and this can explain for instance the situation of France, where cross-industry bargaining takes place, but where wage bargaining is mainly dealt with at branch level. It is based on recent publications by the European Commission (Visser in EC, 2004; Sciarra in EC, 2006b) and the European Foundation (Schulten, 2005) on wage bargaining levels. It is worth noting that the three sources do not fully coincide. For Lithuania, Hungary and Romania the difference of interpretation is due to the fact that Schulten (2005) consider cross-industry bargaining on a national minimum wage.

Table 7. Wage bargaining levels in European countries on the sample

Country	Intersectoral level	Sectoral level	Company level	Country	Intersectoral level	Sectoral level	Company level
Belgium				Lithuania			
Visser	***	**	*	Visser		*	***
Schulten	***	*	*	Schulten	*** (a)	*	***
Sciarra	**	***	*	Sciarra		*	***
France				Poland			
Visser		*	***	Visser		*	***
Schulten	*	**	**	Schulten		*	***
Sciarra		**	**	Sciarra	*	*	***
Germany				Romania			
Visser		***	*	Visser		*	***
Schulten		***	*	Schulten	*** (a)	*	***
Sciarra		***	**	Sciarra	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Hungary				Slovakia			
Visser	*	*	***	Visser	*	**	**
Schulten	*** (a)	*	***	Schulten		***	*
Sciarra	*	**	***	Sciarra		***	**
Ireland				Spain			
Visser	***		*	Visser	*	**	**
Schulten	***	*	*	Schulten	*	***	*
Sciarra	***	*	*	Sciarra	*	***	**
Italy				Sweden			
Visser		***	**	Visser		***	*
Schulten		***	*	Schulten		***	*
Sciarra	*	***	**	Sciarra		***	*

(a) On minimum wage.

Sources: Visser in EC, 2004; Schulten, 2005, Sciarra in EC, 2006b (elaborated by Cedefop).

According to these data, and beyond the slight differences in the interpretation, three groups of countries can be identified: one group includes countries where

cross-industry collective bargaining predominates; the second one includes the countries where sector-level bargaining is the most important; and the third one contains countries where the most important level of wage bargaining is the company (Table 8). These results call for several observations.

Table 8. Dominant level of wage bargaining per country

Dominant level of wage bargaining	Countries
Cross-industry	Belgium, Ireland
Sector	Germany, Spain, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden
Company	France, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania

Source: Cedefop (2007).

The sectoral social partners do not still play a key role across EU Member States. This is particularly true in the new Member States, where sector-level social dialogue is traditionally considered as weak (see e.g. EC, 2004). While this level of industrial relations plays the dominant role, or at least an important role in 13 of the former EU-15 Member States (Visser in EC, 2004; Schulten, 2005), this is not the case in most of the new Member States, where collective bargaining mainly takes place at national cross-industry level or at company level.

However, even where there are no strong bodies at branch-level, it does not imply that the trade unions and employer organisations in the sectors are not interested by challenges in terms of training and education. This being said, in countries with weak industrial relations structures at sectoral level, there is also a lack of relevant interlocutors and entities that could serve as coordination tools for sector-wide policies.

5.1.1. Cross-industry versus sectoral approaches in LLL/VET

How do social partners approach LLL and vocational training at cross-industry and sector level? Are there differences when one goes from one level to another? The interviews clearly show that the approach to LLL and VET is different at cross-industry and at sector level.

At cross-industry level, the social partners are interested in LLL, including broad issues related to the labour market and to national competitiveness. Their interest embraces access to training and education for all, training for groups at risk on the labour market, competitiveness and employability.

On the other hand, at sector level, the respondents' approach is more focused, targeted on vocational training rather than LLL. It is also more concrete and more specific, with a strong attention given to company and worker needs. From a sectoral point of view, the company is the place where training needs emerge, even

when sector-level collective bargaining plays a key role. Romania gives an illustrating example of this situation (Box 27).

Box 27. Cross-industry and sectoral approaches

The objectives of the employers' organisation are expressed as follows: making training of the confederation's members adapted to the requirements of the labour market; providing the possibility for employees to acquire the knowledge, skills and qualifications which could, on the one hand, enable them to use new technologies efficiently, and on the other hand, increase occupational mobility and reduce employment risks; training the labour force that enters the labour market for the first time and whose initial education is considered insufficient.

The objectives of the trade union confederation are: raising employees' awareness of the role and importance of continuous training in the context of economic restructuring, rapid technological change, and need to adapt to EU standards; adapting training of employees to the requirements of the workplace; favouring professional adaptation required by economic restructuring; updating job-specific knowledge; preventing unemployment risks.

Source: Romania employers and employees cross industry respondents.

Themes included in the employer federation's programme on VET concern the preparation of occupational standards for the majority of professions in the chemical and petrochemical sector, as a basis for professional training; the preparation of professional standards for schools and higher education; the organisation of courses for the employees in the sector. The objective is to adapt the employee skills to the requirements of current production system and technology

Source: Romanian employer respondent in the Chemical industry

Compared to the cross-industry level, the sectoral social partners' approach is more concerned by industrial change and by adaptations or developments in qualifications made necessary by structural change. It is centred on vocational training in companies, for workers and for workplaces, with a concern for crucial challenges in terms of qualifications: changing market demands, technological change, restructuring that imposes job changes and induces threats on employment.

In a fast changing context such as one can find in telecommunications, electricity or the chemical industry, there are growing concerns for the anticipation of qualifications and skill needs. In such cases, the social partners are interested in specific tools that could help them identify the needs and changes in qualifications, such as for instance up-to-date comparative data, support to pilot projects in analysing qualifications, Europass, European-wide recognition qualifications.

Beyond that, it is interesting to examine whether vocational training is on the social partners' agenda and whether they negotiate on this issue. There is also a difference between responses at cross-industry and at sector level.

At cross-industry level, LLL and vocational training are clearly and largely on the agenda of the social partners in the different countries, with exceptions in Hungary,

Poland and Slovakia. It is useful to note here that, even in national contexts where there is no cross-industry collective bargaining, social partners at this level consider that LLL issues are important, and increasingly important, and they adopt 'umbrella' positions – such as is the case for instance in Lithuania and Sweden – or define frameworks for discussions at lower levels.

In the sectors, the importance of training in the social partners' agenda and in sector-level collective bargaining clearly depends on the structure of the industrial relations system. Here, two main trends have been identified:

- (a) where training issues are dealt with by sector-level social partners and where they have the institutional capacity to conduct collective bargaining in the sector, VET is in collective bargaining and is the object of collective agreements, be it under the umbrella of a cross-industry agreement, as is the case in Belgium and France, or not, like in Germany and Italy;
- (b) in decentralised systems, training is either negotiated at company level, or simply left to employers' initiatives. The postal sector in Hungary gives an example of such a situation. In new Member States, training topics are rarely on the social partners' agenda at sector level, and this can be explained by several reasons: weakness of organisations at this level in terms of structures, resources and power, and absence or weakness of sector-level collective bargaining: this is the case in Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

This does not mean that social partners are not interested in training issues, but that their role in the national system of industrial relations leaves no space or gives no reason to invest in these issues. In the case of Slovakia, bargaining in general formally takes place at sector level, but all discussions on VET, if any, are left to the company level.

It is important to note here that the social partners' role in training is not only related to their interest or awareness of qualification and skill challenges; it also depends on their resources: Lithuanian trade union interviewees, for instance, complain about their lack of resources and influence in general, which makes difficult or impossible for them to invest in VET discussions; similarly, the Hungarian trade unionist in the postal services considers that the employers have the initiative and that there is a need to create and/or strengthen partnerships in the field of VET (Box 28).

In such a decentralised context in the new Member States, there are however interesting perspectives where sector-level social partners are interested in VET or have concerns about qualifications and training, even if they do not negotiate on these issues. In Hungary, the social partners in the chemical industry declare that they are concerned about training in a restructuring context, changing technological environment and market demands, but they do not negotiate on these issues, either

because bargaining takes place at company level or because bargaining concentrates on wage only.

Box 28. Training in decentralised systems

Trade unions do not participate in shaping the training programmes. They participate only in conflict resolution when a specific training programme is organised at the expense of free time and threatens the employees work-life balance or the quality of life, such is the case for instance when training is organised during weekends. LLL and VET are regulated outside the industrial relations system.

Source: Hungarian trade union respondent in postal service sector.

In Poland, VET is not on the agenda of the respondents in telecoms and post, whereas there is an increasing interest for it in the chemical industry and road transport; in the chemical industry, the social partners have concluded an agreement but they regret that the lack of resources is an obstacle to reaching concrete achievements (Box 29). Finally, in Slovakia, vocational training is on the social partners' agenda in the chemical industry, but the issue is, in practice, left to company level initiatives.

Box 29. Training in decentralised systems: other perspectives

The trade union respondent stressed two new patterns. First, the traditional training system has changed radically since 1998 and the companies have introduced a new model of professional training to respond to the needs of the labour market. In relation with this new model there is a new system of adult training. For example customer-tailored training will be organised. Second, it is necessary to pay more attention to training on-the-job. The importance of forms of non-formal learning is increasing very quickly due to the fast changes in technology and market requirements. According to the respondent, the Hungarian public discourse on LLL and VET, unfortunately, does not pay enough attention to the role of on-the-job training. The most important topic of social dialogue in the electricity sector is the system of wages and bonuses, whereas the training system is built up independently from trade unions.

Source: Hungary trade unionist, electricity.

In Poland, the social partners' interest for VET is very limited, be it at cross-industry or sectoral level. However, in this context, the chemical industry constitutes an exception. The trade union respondent insisted on the importance of VET in the sector, notably to improve qualifications and preserve worker employability, along with concerns for technological change and safety at work. Sectoral federations have concluded an agreement on VET. It provides for information on the developments of the sector and the analysis of training needs. However, the trade union official considers that the lack of resources is an obstacle to reaching concrete achievements.

Source: Poland, chemical industry trade unionist.

5.2. Social partners' approach of VET, comparison between sectors

Beyond the difference of perspective between cross-industry and sectoral social partners, are there differences between the sectors? As a simple hypothesis, one can expect differences because training and training needs are largely influenced by technological and socioeconomic trends, which differ from one sector to another.

From an industrial relations perspective, the situation in each sector depends on two groups of factors: on the one hand, the social partners' approach to vocational training is influenced by the specific technical and socioeconomic developments at play in the sector; on the other hand, their role in vocational training is determined by the relative place they occupy in each national industrial relations system.

In any case, the sectoral socioeconomic dynamics clearly play a role in the differentiation between sectors across national borders:

- (a) the few number of interviews in the trade sector signal a focus on concrete aspects of training: technical needs, contribution to the improvement of customer relationships, training for managers. For instance, in Italy, the sector has specific funds and a joint body dedicated to training of workers and managers in the sector;
- (b) the telecommunication sector gives a clearer picture where liberalisation, technological change and customer demands generate an interest for change in qualifications. In France, the respondents in this sector also mention an interest for certification. In Romania, trade union considers that training has become essential in the context of liberalisation, technological change, higher customer demands and market competition.

In Spain, social partners from both sides of the industry on telecommunications -and trade- sector see interesting from European institutions in the field of VET/LLL the issue of the recognitions of qualifications and how to cope with this issue;

- (c) in the postal services, it is not easy to distinguish the sector from the company level, especially in countries where one company coincides with the whole branch. This is why answers may refer to company policies as well as challenges for the postal activities in general. Overall, in the postal services, restructuring, liberalisation and new productive requirements raise new challenges for qualifications and for employment.

Anyhow, the social partners in the postal sector are concerned by the need to anticipate the changes in qualifications in the future and the necessity of training to support industrial change and maintain employment. However, the

importance of training in the changing context is not perceived as such everywhere: in Poland and Slovakia, training initiatives and discussions are left to company level;

- (d) as for electricity, the main contextual element is that the sector is currently hit by major restructuring. The interviews in this sector have been conducted in seven countries, and the respondents generally underline the importance of training in a sector undergoing liberalisation, restructuring, technological change, increased market requirements. In such a context, maintaining and increasing qualification levels, identifying the changes in skills and, in some case, detecting the needs for certification of specific qualifications, such as electricians', are perceived as crucial. In Sweden, the respondents insist on the interest of certification in the context of an increasingly European labour market;
- (e) the chemical industry gives another example of a sector undergoing major changes affecting work organisation, jobs and qualifications, which in turn generate important training needs. As is the case in electricity, restructuring and technological change make training a key challenge to face the future. Respondents in this sector also mention the increasing constraints related to environmental protection, which generate specific training needs to adapt industrial processes to new requirements. One respondent also underlines the challenge of demographic change that threatens the sector's capacity to replace progressively older workers by qualified young workers in the future. All this increases the need for adaptation supported by training, and for the anticipation of change supported by the identification of the changes in qualifications. Even in Poland, where VET is not on the social partners' agenda in the other sectors under study, the chemical industry is an exception: the trade union respondent insists on the interest of training to increase worker qualifications, for instance in relation with new technologies and with safety at work, and according to the interviewee, the social partners have concluded an agreement for the sector, but they lack resources for implementing its provision into practice.
There is a similar case in Slovakia, where both cross-industry and sectoral social partners pay little attention to training, except in the chemical industry, where VET is on the trade unions' and employees' agenda, even if it is negotiated at company level only. The interviews conducted in the chemical industry clearly show that training is considered a crucial issue in the sector across the national institutional backgrounds;
- (f) finally, the road transport differs from electricity and the chemical industry, since the interviews do not indicate a need or a strategy to develop training. In the

interviews conducted in the road transport, there is an interest for vocational training, but the focus is on specific technical aspects, such as languages and road regulations in an increasingly Europeanised market.

In sum, training emerges as an important issue in all sectors, but the degree of attention that the social partners pay to training issues varies according to the magnitude of challenges that each sector has to face:

- (a) in telecommunications, the chemical industry, electricity and postal services, the social partners are concerned by training in the context of major restructuring, changing market conditions and technological change. They see training as a crucial means to handle change in the companies, and also as a means to maintain worker employability. Their needs in the field of training are not expressed in terms of specific content, but rather in terms of necessity to be able to face change in jobs and qualifications, and also the necessity to anticipate the qualification needs of the future;
- (b) by contrast, if there is an interest for training in trade and road transport, it is expressed in more technical terms, such as for instance in terms of specific training needs, rather than in long-term strategies. The important representation of small and medium enterprises in the two sectors may lead to a difficulty for social partners to identify common policies and objectives for all companies in the sector.

Finally, if we consider the degree of awareness of sector-level social partners for VET issues and their role in building collective agreements for the sector, there are four types of situations:

- (a) the social partners have not approached VET issues, and there is no collective bargaining in the sector on these issues. Therefore, the social partners do not play a role in VET issues in the sector. This is the case, for instance, in the road transport in Lithuania;
- (b) the social partners have a partial interest in VET issues, even where collective bargaining takes place at sector level. This is the case, for instance, when collective bargaining in the sector focuses mostly on wage issues, such as is the case in electricity in Hungary;
- (c) the social partners are interested in VET issues, but collective bargaining takes place at another level than the sector or concentrates on other aspects. Telecoms in Romania, or the chemical industry in Slovakia, are in this situation;
- (d) the social partners are interested in VET issues and these are included in collective bargaining and agreements taking place at sector level, as is the case for instance in telecoms, postal services and electricity in France. The

chemical industry in Germany, electricity in Sweden, trade, the chemical industry and electricity in Italy, also give interesting examples of such a situation (Box 30).

Box 30. Sectoral social partners approaching training issues

In 2003, a collective agreement for qualifications was signed in Lower Saxony. It aims at strengthening companies' competitiveness and employees' employability. In addition, during last years several sectors (e.g. chemical, private insurance) have concluded collective agreements focussing on provision of continuous vocational training.

Sources: Germany, employers' organisation in the chemical industry.

The discussions between trade unions and employers result in collective agreements. They are binding when they concern the amount of the employees' benefits when they go on training or how training is organised. Other agreements are rather joint opinions that concern what the organisations consider as LLL, the incentives to promote the cooperation with companies, which tools to use to analyse the future needs. Both trade unions and employers' federations are involved in certification. Via collective agreements, they decide what knowledge an electrician should have to be employed, what kind of training the companies should give to their employees and apprentices.

Sources: Sweden, trade union and employers' organisation in the electricity sector.

Vocational training, financed through the inter-professional funds, is managed jointly by the social partners. For example, in the case of a submission of a demand for funding of a training programme, the request is normally annexed to an agreement that guarantees the coherence of the training process. This kind of request can concern either sectoral, territorial or company training plans, involving the social partner representatives at their respective level. Initiatives can start at company level, as an expression of specific needs and requirements, and then involve sectoral or confederal social partners. Otherwise, they can come from the sectoral or confederal level, as the expression of shared needs and requirements, and then involve company players.

Sources: Italy, employers' organisation in the trade sector

In the next three to five years, the organisation consulted will be committed to call for more attention to VET, since the electricity sector is in great transformation. On one hand, over the last 10 years, there has been a tendency to reduce employment, and therefore there is a growing problem of reallocation of workers outside the productive cycle. On the other hand, the necessity of reconverting older, costly and polluting combustible oil plants into more efficient natural gas or coal plants will make it indispensable to re-qualify workers. In any case, VET will play a key role in increasing both company competitiveness and worker employability.

Sources: Italy, trade union in the electricity sector.

VET is of great relevance for the social partners in the chemical industry. This kind of issues is of twofold importance for the sectoral social partners. First, the specific features of the chemical sector require great investments – in R&D as well as VET – to face technological, environmental, and health and safety challenges. Second, and more generally, continuing vocational training has received growing attention as a means to increase both company competitiveness and worker employability.

Sources: Italy, trade union in the chemical industry.

In sum, there are two key dimensions that can explain how social partners play – or do not play – a role in VET in each sector:

- (a) the sectors under restructuring, where technological change is important, and that face changing markets, are highly concerned by training as a key means to face change and to anticipate future needs of the companies and workers in the branch;
- (b) the social partners' capacity in the national industrial relations context determines the degree to which they can play a role in the field. In this respect, in the new Member States, their weakness, and the general weakness of sector-level social dialogue do not create favourable conditions for social partners at sector level to play an active role in VET.

5.3. Sectoral social partners and European policies

5.3.1. Awareness of European policies in LLL and VET

Are sector-level social partners aware of European policies in LLL and VET? The interviews clearly show that there is a long way to walk to raise more awareness on European policies when one goes from the cross-industry to the sectoral level.

If cross-industry respondents are informed of the existence of EU policies and have an idea of their content, the sectoral players' interests are mostly determined by the needs of companies and workers.

Focusing on the sector-level interviews, four types of situations can be identified:

- (a) in the first one, the social partners in the sector would acknowledge to be more aware of European policies in general. Sometimes, they do not identify explicitly connections between their own situation and the European initiatives. All interviews at sector-level in Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia tend to reflect such a situation. It illustrates a kind of disconnection between sector-level social partners in some of the new Member States and the European policies in the field of LLL and VET, which can be explained, again, by a decentralised approach to training, mostly left to company-level initiatives. This is, logically, related to weak sector-level social dialogue, combined with a distance between sectoral social partners and European affairs;
- (b) in the second situation, the social partners consider that European policies have an influence on the sector. Nevertheless, they are rather industrial or economic and competition policies, such as the Reach directive for the chemical industry or European regulations in road transport. One finds this type of answer in interviews developed in Belgium, in the chemical industry in

Hungary, in electricity in Italy, or in responses for telecommunications and electricity in Romania;

- (c) in the third situation, the social partners are aware of the existence of EU policies in the field of LLL and vocational education, and specifically the Copenhagen-Helsinki process, but they consider that there are no formal or explicit links between their own situation or action and these policies. Here, if links may emerge, they are not seen as the result of a top-down process, but they rather develop incidentally. There are examples in post in France, or in the chemical industry and trade in Italy;
- (d) finally, in a fourth type of situation, the respondents are informed about the Copenhagen-Helsinki policies, and more generally about the Lisbon agenda and the European employment strategy, and they see relationships between the European processes and the discussions and negotiations in their sector, as it is the case, for instance, in electricity in Italy.

Overall, the preoccupations of sector-level social partners are more closely related to companies' and workers' needs than to European processes as such. The data also indicate that there is no common sectoral trend across the countries.

This does not mean that there are no relationships at all between the Copenhagen-Helsinki process and the practice of the social partners in the sectors, because the link can either be implicit or be 'emergent', with non-coordinated connections between the preoccupations in the sectors and the European processes.

It is interesting to note here that other European processes are seen as having a clearer impact on the sectors: the Reach Directive for the chemical industry, the liberalisation of electricity, the restructuring of postal services, the regulations of road transport, are considered as having strong influence on the challenges of the sector in terms of training and qualifications.

In any case, however, even if considering the responses with precaution, the conclusion is clear: if the social partners are meant to play a stronger role in the Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities, then there is a big room to continue to work on raising more awareness of the process. In the new Member States, this need is bigger and it is also combined to a need of more resources. Regarding the weak importance of sectoral social dialogue in these countries, the need to strengthen European processes process and sectoral social partners in these cases is even larger.

5.3.2. Sectoral social partners: expectations and needs *vis-à-vis* European institutions

There is, here again, a clear difference between the cross-industry and the sectoral social partners, since the former ones tend to be more aware and have clearer demands, whereas the latter rarely express precise needs.

A first group is composed of interviewees, who did simply not answer the question, and of respondents who declare that they have no particular demand or need to express, which is often the case, logically, when they are less aware about the European processes. These answers were very present in the new Member States.

Others are interested in more 'Europeanisation' in the field of training, and in European initiatives in the field of VET, in the form of specific tools in terms of quality assurance, certification, identification of qualification needs, EQF. Such demands are found in responses in the road transport in Germany, in trade and telecommunications in Spain, in telecommunications in Romania, in electricity in Slovakia.

They may also call for greater involvement of European social partners structures, such as the European works councils (e.g. in postal services in France) or the European sectoral social dialogue players (e.g. Italy, trade). One must note here that this type of point of view comes from respondents who are personally involved, directly or indirectly, in the EU social dialogue.

Between these two extreme situations, the social partners in the sectors often express the need for two types of information: clear and simple information on European developments; comparative data on training practice in the sector in the different Member States. In terms of information, the respondents declare themselves interested in documentation on qualifications, comparative data and information on training and qualifications, dissemination of studies and research results, cross-national contacts, exchange of experience. In all these fields, the respondents heavily insist on the need for simple and clear information to support them in day-to-day practice.

In this respect, the need for simple, up-to-date and concrete information which a clear need expressed to translate information in other languages than English, which is not fluently practiced by most sector-level social partners, especially in the new Member States.

Other demands are expressed in terms of funding, proactive contacts with social partners, the involvement of European sectoral social partners in information processes, support to pilot projects. The chemical industry in Poland is an interesting example of a social partners' initiative across borders, where the organisations would be interested in more support (Box 31).

Box 31. Cross border cooperation between social partners

The trade union has started cooperation with German and Slovak partners in the sector, and initiated a Euro Part 2 programme. The participants are trade union members, employer representatives and civil servants from the national labour inspection services. Cooperation consists in exchange of experience, about legislation and regulation in the field of safety, but also about new technologies. Meetings take place every two months, each time in a different company. Presentations are made by employers and workers representatives, but also by teachers and researchers.

Source: Poland, trade unionist from chemical industry.

In some specific cases, the respondents ask for precise tools: this is the case, in particular, in Romania, where interviewees in electricity and in the chemical industry ask for active support in developing standard qualifications and identifying skill needs. In the case of the chemical industry, this clearly reflects a specificity of this sector in Slovakia, with a great interest for VET in the context of the development of a Europeanised market.

In conclusion, there is a big ground to set up strategies to involve more actively sectoral players, in particular to social partners' organisations in the new Member States. But, the language should be an obstacle here, as most of sector-level players do not speak English language fluently.

5.4. Synthesis on the relations between cross sectoral and sectoral players

The data clearly show that LLL and VET policies cannot be considered as following a simple top-down approach from the European Institutions, to the national States, and from there to the cross-industry level to the sector players and, finally, to companies.

Several reasons easily explain why it does not work that way. Sectoral social partners are generally less aware of European policies in the field of LLL and VET, whereas the cross-industry social partners are really more informed and aware of the Copenhagen-Helsinki process and the Lisbon agenda, the European employment strategy and, in some cases, the Bologna process. However, in cross-industry organisations, the resources for European affairs are generally scarce, and the persons in charge of European affairs do not necessarily work closely with the persons in charge of training and education questions within the organisations.

As for the relationships between the cross-industry players and the sectoral players, they are determined by each industrial relations system, and they depend on the degree of coordination within each national system. Only in strongly

coordinated industrial relations systems can the cross-industry structures potentially organise the transmission between European issues and sector-level agendas. Anyhow, even in such a case, the priority given to national agendas have to be considered to set up strategies supporting social partners organisations to raise more awareness.

In the new Member States, the weakness of sector-level social dialogue in general determines the role they are playing: social partners may be interested in training issues, but they do not necessarily have the resources and the institutional capacity to deal with these issues for the sector, or they are not really interested by these issues because their agenda focuses on other quantitative aspects of the collective bargaining (e.g. wages).

This does not mean that there are no connections between European processes (e.g. Copenhagen process) and the social partners' priorities, but this is more a matter of 'convergence without coordination' (Hancké, 2002; Marginson and Sisson, 2004), where similar concerns emerge from common market changes and from competitive and institutional isomorphism (diMaggio and Powell, 1983). This can be seen, for instance, in similar demands for greater transparency in qualifications such as in electricity and the chemical industry.

This is reflected also in the frequent demands for comparative information and data, related to the fact respondents in the Member States are more and more confronted to cross-border or supra-national challenges. This comes in support to Marginson and Sisson's (2004) conclusion, according to which there are increasing similarities within sectors across borders, and increasing differences between sectors within countries.

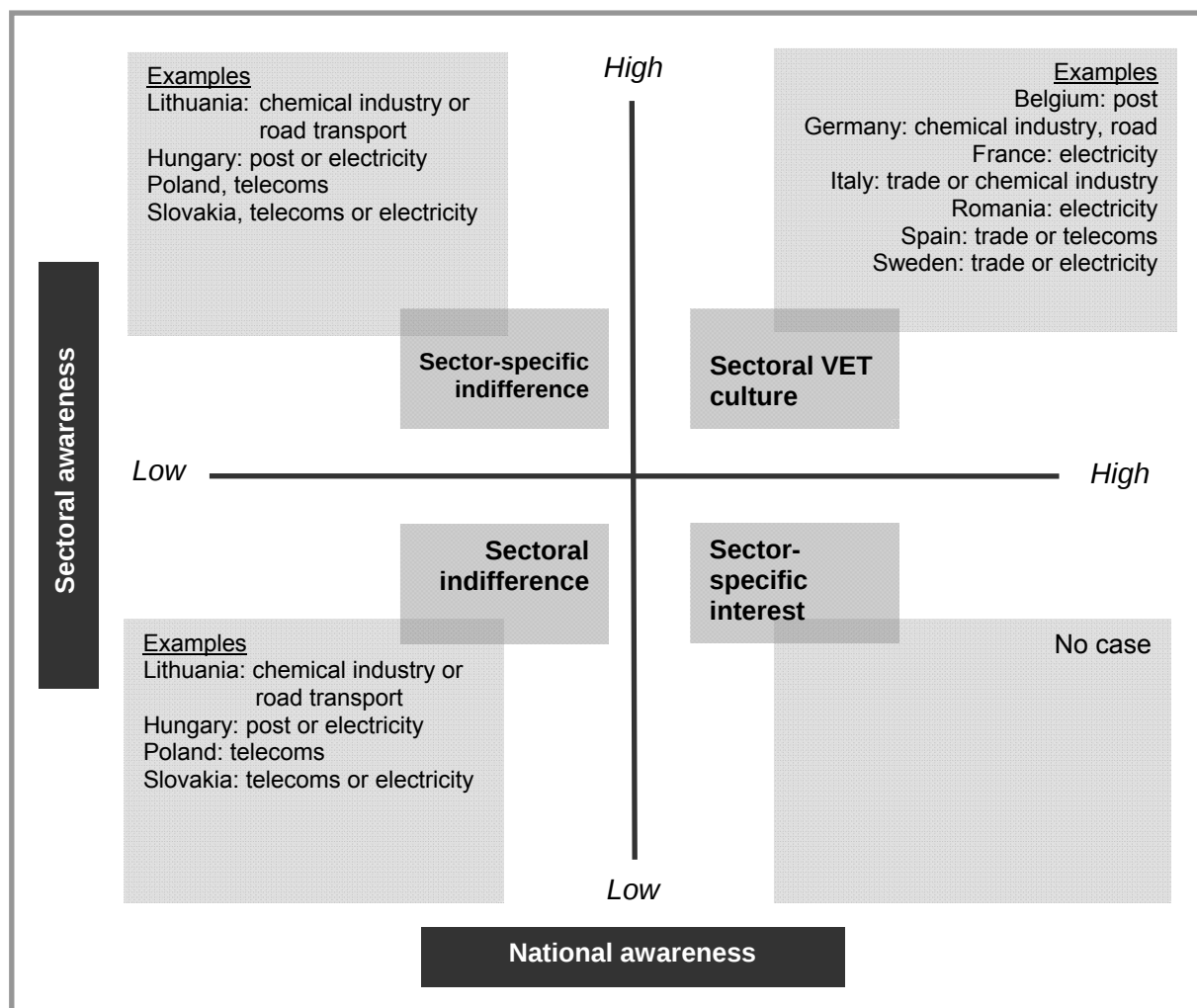
Nevertheless, overall there is no clear sectoral determination, since the responses do not converge to similar positions in each sector across the countries. The national situation prevails on potential sector-specific logics, and it is clearly the national context, both in terms of institutional training and education context, and in terms of industrial relations, that shape the responses in the sectors in each of the countries.

In other words, in a country where there is a high degree of awareness of the Copenhagen-Helsinki process, and of training and LLL in general, this high degree of awareness will be reflected in the sectors. By contrast, in countries where there is a low degree of awareness of these issues, the sectoral social partners will also tend to reflect the general national context. As far as sectoral respondents are concerned, this latter situation can be found, for instance, in Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

There are, however, interesting exceptions, with the chemical industry in Poland and in Slovakia, where social partners are concerned about training in the current

fast-changing context. All this suggest four types of ideal-types at sector level, as they are presented in the following matrix.

Figure 2. **Four types of sectoral situations within the national contexts**



Therefore, if planning to increase the sector-level social partners' awareness and involve them more in the Copenhagen process in education and training, it may be useful to differentiate the approach:

- (a) it seems to be particularly difficult to reach and interest sector-level social partners in sectors and countries where they are not interested in VET issues and do not discuss these issues. Such cases would require much time and resources to raise awareness, in a context where they do not have, in any case, the capacity to invest in this field. Raising awareness, if considered useful, would then require very simple and basic information;

- (b) sector-specific exceptions, such as the chemical industry in Poland and Slovakia, are more interesting in this respect, with social partners' interest for more support and information. The difficulty here consists in identifying the relevant interlocutors and to reach them;
- (c) the third ideal-type reflects situations where the social partners' needs and demands are more precise and elaborated, in contexts where the social partners have already a tradition and diverse practices in VET. More detailed information and more elaborated support could then be envisaged.

In all cases, however, it is clear that the cross-industry social partners could not be the most relevant interlocutor if the objective is to reach sectoral players, except in vertically coordinated industrial relations systems (Traxler, 2002) where the cross-industry level directly influences the lower levels of collective bargaining, such is the case for instance in Belgium.

But it would also be unrealistic to try to reach all sector-level trade unions and employer organisations in a wide range of branches in all the countries, particularly if one considers the need to do it preferably in the national languages.

Therefore, the suggestion made by several respondents to involve the European sectoral social partners deserves attention. European social partners are themselves interested in LLL and VET, as joint texts and work programmes elaborated by the European sectoral social dialogue committees will indicate (see Chapter 6).

They are also involved in capacity-building programmes with their member organisations in the new Member States. Their position in the European sectoral committees potentially gives them a privileged situation to act as a link between the Copenhagen-Helsinki process and the sector-level players in all Member States.

6. The European social partners

Chapter three (transversal analysis) highlighted that lifelong learning and vocational training are clearly on the agenda of the social partners at European and national level, both in the cross-industry social dialogue or in the sectoral committees. This chapter intends to complement the previous information.

First, results of an analysis of the European Social Observatory (OSE) database are presented. This insight provides a chronological compilation of the cross-industry joint texts that refer to lifelong learning, issued by the diverse bipartite European social dialogue committees. Second, this database provides data on the work programmes set up by the sectoral social partners, which give an indication of the attention that the sectoral committees pay to lifelong learning and vocational training in their activities in recent years. Third, interviews conducted with European social partners provide specific information on the needs and requirements they address – or not – to European institutions to perform on the Copenhagen process.

6.1. Cross-industry social partners

The European cross-industry social partners cope with lifelong learning and vocational training since the end of the 1980s, as the data in Table 9 show. The table gathers the joint texts issued by the cross-industry social partners. It also shows the chronology of the cross-industry joint texts on training.

Nearly all those texts are addressed to European or national institutions, and they are either joint opinions or process-oriented texts, with no binding content – collective agreement – in the traditional sense as it is generally understood in the Member States. This is not a surprise when one considers that the European social dialogue almost never produce regulation in the strict sense and is closer to a political role than to collective bargaining as such (Dufresne and Pochet, 2006; Eurofound, 2007).

Table 9. European cross-industry joint texts concerning LLL

Text	Type	Employers	Unions	Date	Addressee
Joint opinion concerning training and motivation, and information and consultation	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	06/03/1987	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on education and training	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	19/06/1990	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on the transition from school to adult and working life	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	05/04/1991	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on ways of facilitating the broadest possible effective access to training opportunities	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	20/12/1991	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on qualifications and certifications	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	13/10/1992	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on the future role and actions of the Community in education and training, including the role of social partners	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	28/07/1993	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on women and training	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	3/12/1993	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on the contribution of VET to combating unemployment and reabsorbing the unemployment into the labour market in the light of the new situation created by the white paper	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	04/04/1995	European institutions/ national institutions
Joint opinion on the draft decision for the second phase of the Community programme for vocational training	Joint opinion	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	01/10/1998	European institutions/ national institutions
Framework of actions for the LLL development of competences and qualifications	Process-oriented text	UNICE, CEEP	ETUC	28/02/2002	National organisations
First follow-up report on the implementation of the frameworks of actions for LLL	Process-oriented text	UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP	ETUC	14/03/2003	European institutions/ national institutions
Second follow-up report on the implementation of the frameworks of actions for LLL	Process-oriented text	UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP	ETUC	05/03/2004	European institutions/ national institutions
Third follow-up report on the implementation of the framework of actions for LLL	Process-oriented text	UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP	ETUC	22/03/2005	European institutions/ national institutions
Evaluation report of the framework of actions for LLL	Process-oriented text	UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP	ETUC	25/01/2006	European institutions/ national institutions

Source: Cedefop (based on the Observatoire Social Européen database).

In addition, the interviews with representatives from the European cross-industry organisations indicate that they are very aware and an active part of the European policies in the field of lifelong learning and vocational training. Indeed, the European social partners, as indicated in their work programme 2006-08, will follow their joint effort to face European labour-markets challenges and they would negotiate an autonomous framework agreement on either integration of disadvantaged groups on the labour market or lifelong learning.

The interest of the European social partners for these issues is associated with several concrete actions:

- (a) they participate actively in various related committees and bodies and they benefit from technical knowledge on specific European policies;
- (b) they have created internal bodies or departments in charge of counselling to draft opinions and to reply to EU consultation. As an illustration, Box 32 presents internal activities initiated by BusinessEurope, UEAPME, ETUC and CEEP;
- (c) they also contributed to the presentation of the Copenhagen Declaration and were foremost actors on the Maastricht Communiqué and the Helsinki Communiqué.

In other words, the European cross-industry social partners are well informed and are participating actively in the Copenhagen process by delivering opinions and/or being key actors, discussing the key topics of the European lifelong learning agenda. Box 32 provides some examples on these aspects.

Additionally, as for the relationships with Cedefop, ETUC and BusinessEurope are members of the governing board of the centre. Furthermore, from the very beginning, the joint opinions of the EU social partners on education and training took Cedefop into consideration. However, the interviews indicate that there is a lot of ground to develop and establish closer cooperation with the European social partners in the field of lifelong learning.

At first sight lifelong learning and vocational training seem to constitute consensual topics at this level, since the interviewees acknowledge that better education and training are essential for competitiveness in a globalised world. Indeed, general objectives are not a source of tension between the players.

Box 32. European cross-industry social partners: examples on active involvement in the framework of the Copenhagen process

LLL and VET are important domains of internal activities within the European organisation, as is clear for instance in papers issued by UEAPME, ETUC, BusinessEurope and CEEP:

- UEAPME position on mobility in the framework of the proposal for the new integrated lifelong learning programme (20 November 2005);
- UEAPME position on the Commission's consultation 'towards a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning' (1 December 2005);
- BusinessEurope position on the Commission consultation on a European Qualification Framework (December 2005);
- UEAPME position on the draft 2006 joint progress report on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme (19 December 2005);
- UEAPME concept paper on measures for improving mobility of apprentices in the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci programme 2007-2013 and of the studies undertaken by the European Commission with the budget line 'Guy-Quint' on an 'Erasmus style' programme for apprentices (10 March 2006);
- UEAPME position paper on the Commission's Communication on implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning (02 March 2006);
- The European Qualification Framework: resolution adopted by the ETUC executive committee in their meeting held in Brussels on 18-19 October 2006;
- UEAPME position paper on adult learning (26 January 2007);
- CEEP opinion on action plan on adult learning: 'it is always good time to learn' (January 2008).

Source: Cedefop and Database of the European Social Observatory (OSE).

However, looking closer to the respondents' positions, there are points of divergence, and particularly regarding financial aspects. During discussions with partners, the following questions have been identified as key issues:

- (a) should workers' participation in a training programme imply a wage increase?
Should their salary be increased if productivity improved as a result of training?
- (b) should training focus on adapting workers' skills to very specific aspects of their job or should it rather develop general competences that are transferable from one employment situation to another?
- (c) who should pay for training: the employer, the State or the worker?
- (d) should training take place, completely or partly, during working hours?
- (e) should the rules and obligations be the same for all kinds of enterprises, including SME's?
- (f) should training be recognised on the professional classifications?

In Table 10, these issues are classified according to domains of concerns to set up further discussion and research. Some of the tensions between both sides of the industry set up negotiations are not new topics. Anyhow, they demonstrate that employers and employees have relevant fields of discussion to initiate and/or continue dialogue processes related to lifelong learning and VET issues.

Table 10. **European social partners: domains of discussion on LLL/VET issues**

Discussion domains	Specific questions
Training on wages and professional development	• wage incentives to participate in training; • impact on wages after training period; • recognition of acquired competences after training period when bargaining professional classifications.
Specific training versus transversal training	• programming training/retraining workers to specific aspects of job; • deliver general and transferable competences (cross-sectoral).
Financing training	• financing training: training paid by employer, the State or the worker; • to find formulas to share costs among different parts.
Working time	• training during working time (completely or partly) versus training out of working hours.
Legislative obligations (equal access/treatment)	• benefit companies according to its size – SMEs –; turnover; sectoral restructuring; promote access of the risk groups,

Source: Cedefop.

6.2. The European Sectoral social partners

Table 11 compiles the joint texts issued by all sectoral committees concerning training, and Table 12 examines the content of the sectoral committees' work programme from 2000 until now, along with additional positions on the subject . Following typology of joint texts can be proposed:

- (a) the first category are joint texts. Most of them consist in joint opinions or statements that generally intend to provide input to the European institutions and/or national authorities. These texts mainly contain recommendations addressed to the authorities or explicitly ask the Commission to include some items in its policies or undertake particular actions;
- (b) the second one are process-oriented texts which are generally addressed to national member organisations. These texts set up guidelines or codes of conduct to be implemented in the national context;
- (c) a third category consists in tools, such as guides or practical manuals, addressed mainly to national organisations or companies.

However, no binding agreement has been found. As Tables 11 and 12 indicate, LLL and VET take place in the discussions of most of the European Sectoral Social

Dialogue Committees, and both joint texts and work programmes cover the issues. The sectoral social partners obviously share a general interest in training, and one can see the vitality of debates and initiatives in this field in the European social partners' joint positions and work programmes.

There are, however, differences between the sectors, with some social partners being very 'active' in this field, as is the case for instance in the chemical industry, textile or woodworking. In others, such as the extractive industry or sugar, there are less joint initiatives. In four committees training seems to be absent from the work programmes over recent years. The interest for training issues in the work programmes goes beyond the sole discussion of joint declarations and agreements, which confirms that the activities of the sectoral committees cannot be examined only by looking at the number of joint texts, agreements or declarations that they produce (Eurofound, 2007).

The work programmes of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue committees include a diversity of initiatives, ranging from general to specific projects:

- (a) they can focus on the definition of joint issues, documentation and sharing of information. This is the case for instance in footwear, furniture, horeca, hospitals, insurance, live performance, maritime transport, personal services, temporary agency work, and woodworking. In the chemical industry sector, for instance, a working group aims at analysing the situation of training within the industry and to develop the topic through exchange of information. In the inland waterways sector, there is a small joint working group, whose goal is to examine and evaluate the available documents in order to prepare a discussion;
- (b) there are procedural instruments, such as follow-up of joint declarations or agreements, ad hoc groups on training or working groups. They can be found for instance in agriculture, banking, catering, chemical industry, construction, inland waterways, postal services, road transport, tanning and leather, telecoms, or textile;
- (c) the committees are also interested in the anticipation of needs and qualifications, in relation with training challenges raised by a changing context. Several committees are concerned by such questions: the chemical industry, civil aviation, commerce, gas, local and regional government, shipbuilding, steel. This is related to challenges for company competitiveness and worker employability;
- (d) for instance, the social partners in commerce plan to promote youth employment in the sector. They declare that they intend to continue in 2007, with a view of defining concrete measures to support and develop the

employability and employment of young men and women in the European commerce;

- (e) specific work programmes refer to concrete projects supported by European funds, such as Force or Leonardo, or related to European policies. This is the case for instance in the following committees: cleaning, furniture, live performance, railways, sea fishing, tanning and leather, woodworking;
- (f) interestingly, the sectoral social partners also plan to work jointly on projects that are directly related to Copenhagen-Helsinki priorities. This can be found in the chemical industry, construction, horeca, inland waterways, private security, sea fishing, shipbuilding, tanning and leather, temporary agency work, textile, woodworking.

They notably focus on transparency, recognition and equivalence of vocational qualifications or diploma. In the inland waterways sector, for example, the social partners have agreed to discuss occupational profiles to establish uniform training requirements and to recognise qualifications. European tools and programmes are mentioned by several sectors, which refer to EQF (chemical industry, tanning leather, woodworking, construction, shipbuilding), ECVET (chemical industry again) and Europass (chemical industry, horeca and tourism, agriculture):

- (g) the committees in agriculture, furniture, inland waterways, tanning and leather, and woodworking, also mention Cedefop explicitly. The work programmes claim that the social partners are interested in discussions with Cedefop experts (agriculture). In some cases, members of the Directorate-Generals for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities encouraged the sectoral social partners to establish contacts with Cedefop (furniture sector, inland waterways);
- (h) in their work programme, the social partners in woodworking plan to cooperate with Cedefop. Some refer to meetings where Cedefop was presented (tanning and leather) or where Cedefop representatives were invited (Horeca and tourism, telecoms). Here again, the chemical industry sector is an interesting example, since it plans, in its work programme, to analyse the existing information on several initiatives, which include activities of Cedefop on sector level.

The interviews conducted with European sectoral social partners and several informal discussions with representatives of sectors that were not covered by the study in the countries (railways, cleaning, personal services, steel, security), add four main points:

- (a) first, there is a growing interest for lifelong learning at sectoral level. It is rather new as a study by the *Observatoire Social Européen* (OSE) in 2004 showed that at that time the interest was limited ⁽¹⁶⁾;
- (b) second, the European sectoral social partners would like to be more approached and involved in current European sectoral activities in VET. There is a clear ground to raise higher mutual awareness, enhance cooperation and set up support between European sectoral social partners and European institutions working in the field of lifelong learning;
- (c) third, when they decide to address training issues in their sector, they generally ask a specialised centre, a university or a private body, to do the initial study. Afterwards, when both sides have accepted the study, this specific centre often becomes a reference centre for further studies;
- (d) fourth, when asked, they are open to more contacts with European institutions in the field of lifelong learning, but they declare that they do not know how to proceed or who they should contact to establishes a practical action.

⁽¹⁶⁾ A on-line survey launched by Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs at the end of 2007 (European social dialogue), shows that social partners matched education and training on second position (after working conditions) in a ranking of most important topics on which social dialogue should focus in the future. For more information, please check on:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/social_dialogue/

Table 11. European sectoral joint texts concerning LLL

Sector	Title	Type	Employers	Unions	Date	Addressee
Agriculture	<i>La formation professionnelle en appui à l'emploi en agriculture</i>	Follow-up report	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	25/09/2004	National organisations
	<i>Accord européen sur la formation professionnelle en agriculture</i>	Process-oriented text	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	5/12/2002	National organisations
	White paper: securing employment through vocational and continuing training in European agriculture	Joint opinion	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	1/01/2000	National organisations
	Opinion concerning training in agriculture	Joint opinion	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	18/11/1993	European institutions/ national authorities
	<i>Avis sur la forêt et l'activité forestière</i>	Joint opinion	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	18/11/1993	European institutions/ national authorities
	Opinion with regard to training for agricultural workers	Joint opinion	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	26/11/1982	European institutions/ national authorities
	Opinion concerning the VET of and cessation of farming by agricultural workers in the context of sociostructural measures proposed by the Commission	Joint opinion	GEOPA, COPA	EFFAT	23/05/1979	European institutions/ national authorities
Banking	<i>Déclaration commune des partenaires sociaux européens du secteur bancaire européen sur le LLL</i>	Process-oriented text	FBE, GECE, GEBC	UNI-Europa	31/03/2003	National organisations
	IT employability in the European banking sector	Joint opinion	FBE, GECE, GEBC	UNI-Europa	14/06/2001	National organisations
	Study on IT employability in the European banking sector	Tool	EACB, ESBG, FBE	UNI-Europa	5/07/2001	European social partners
Chem. industry	<i>Position commune sur l'éducation, la formation professionnelle et la LLL dans l'industrie chimique européenne</i>	Joint opinion	ECEG	EMCEF	10/09/2004	European social partners

Sector	Title	Type	Employers	Unions	Date	Addressee
Civil Aviation	Statement on the ATCO License draft Directive	Joint opinion	CANSO	ETF	16/06/2005	European institutions/ national authorities
	Joint statement on quality, safety and training in the ground handling sector	Joint opinion	ACI Europe	ETF	21/01/2005	European institutions/ national authorities
	Opinion on the VET of ground engineers and maintenance staff	Joint opinion	AEA, CANS, ERA, ACI-Europe, IACA	ETF,ECA	15/09/1993	European institutions/ national authorities
	Statement on dispatchers	Joint opinion	AEA, CANSO, ERA, ACI-Europe, IACA	ETF,ECA	18/12/1992	European institutions/ national authorities
	Joint statement on the harmonisation of air traffic controller's license	Joint opinion	AEA, CANSO, ERA, ACI-Europe, IACA	ETF,ECA	20/11/1991	European institutions/ national authorities
Cleaning industry	<i>Orientations adoptées dans le cadre du dialogue social sur la formation professionnelle</i>	Process-oriented text	FENI	EURO-FIET	9/02/1995	National organisations
Commerce	Social partners sign letter of intend BeQUAWE European certified training	Process-oriented text	Eurocommerce, REWE, Metro AG & Institute for vocational training	Uni-Europa commerce	28/11/2006	National organisations
	Memorandum on training in the retail trade	Joint opinion	CECD	EURO-FIET	19/10/1988	European institutions/ national authorities
Con-struction	Tutorship	Tool	FIEC, EBC	EFBWW	31/12/2003	Companies
Electricity	Joint statement on the future skills need in the European electricity sector	Joint opinion	EURELEC-TRIC	EMCEF, EPSU	22/06/2004	European social partners
	<i>Déclaration commune et rapport final de l'étude sur l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie dans le secteur de l'électricité</i>	Joint opinion	EURELEC-TRIC	EMCEF, EPSU	12/06/2003	European social partners
	Final report on the study on LLL in the electricity sector	Tool	EURELEC-TRIC	EMCEF, EPSU	20/12/2002	National organisations
	Declaration on the social implications of the internal electricity market	Joint opinion	EURELEC-TRIC	EMCEF, EPSU	7/11/2000	European institutions/ national authorities
Extractive Industry	Position of the European social partners, sectoral committee mines on training and continuing training	Joint opinion	APEP, Euracoal, Euromines	EMCEF	13/01/2004	Companies
	<i>Prise de position concernant la formation initiale et continue</i>	Joint opinion	APEP, Euracoal, Euromines	EMCEF	1/04/2003	National organisations

Sector	Title	Type	Employers	Unions	Date	Addressee
Horeca/ Tourism	Guidelines for training and development in SMEs in the Horeca sector	Tool	HOTREC	EFFAT	11/06/2004	National organisations
	Training and development under construction	Joint opinion	HOTREC	EFFAT	14/01/2004	National organisations
Inland navigation	Proposal to the Commission for a Regulation applicable to passenger and goods vessels plying the Community's inland waterways with the exception of the Rhine	Joint opinion	UENF, OEB	ETF	1/02/1993	European institutions/ national authorities
	Opinion on a draft directive on the reciprocal recognition of boatmasters' certificate	Joint opinion	UENF, OEB	ETF	21/01/1988	European institutions/ national authorities
	Conclusions of the working party 'vocational training'	Joint opinion	UENF, OEB	ETF	21/01/1988	European institutions/ national authorities
Insurance	<i>Proposition de déclaration commune des PS du secteur de l'assurance</i>	Joint opinion	CEA, BIPAR, ACME	UNI-Europa	10/06/2003	National organisations
	<i>Enquête sur l'offre et la demande de formation dans les pays de l'UE</i>	Tool	CEA, BIPAR, ACME	UNI-Europa	1/01/2003	National organisations
Perform. art sector	<i>Déclaration commune sur la formation tout au long de la vie</i>	Joint opinion	PEARLE	EURO-MEI	27/05/2000	National organisation
Personal Services	Declaration on the conclusions of the evolution of professional hairdresser training	Joint opinion	EU coiffure	UNI Europa Hair&Beauty	21/09/2005	European social partners
	The European hairdressing certificate	Tool	CIC	UNI Europa Hair&Beauty	1/01/2000	National organisations
Post	<i>Déclaration commune sur la formation et le développement des compétences</i>	Joint opinion	Post-Europe	UNI	22/06/2006	European social partner
	<i>Table ronde sur le thème 'formation et développement des compétences'</i>	Tool	Post-Europe	UNI	29/11/2000	National organisations
Private security	<i>La formation professionnelle dans le secteur de la sécurité privée</i>	Process-oriented text	CoESS	EURO-FIET	24/09/1996	National organisations

Sector	Title	Type	Employers	Unions	Date	Addressee
Railways	Joint working group on the use of new technologies in training	Joint opinion	CER,EIM	ETF	1/05/2005	National organisations
	Report of the employability working group of the committee for the European sectoral social dialogue railway	Joint opinion	CER, EIM	ETF	1/11/2001	European social partners
	The 'employability' concept-usable by European rail companies?	Tool	CER	ETF	11/01/2001	National organisations
	<i>Groupe d'étude paritaire sur l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies dans la formation.</i>	Tool	CER	ETF	1/05/2000	National organisations
Road transport	Joint recommendations on employment and training in logistics	Process-oriented text	IRU	ETF	31/03/2006	National organisations
Sea fishing	<i>Principaux résultats du forum européen pour la reconnaissance mutuelle des brevets dans le secteur de la pêche maritime en Europe</i>	Joint opinion	EUROPECHE, COGECA	ETF	21/11/2000	European social partners
	<i>Avis: Comité paritaire pour les problèmes sociaux dans la pêche maritime</i>	Joint opinion	EUROPECHE, COGECA	ETF	30/10/1996	European social partners
	Recommendation on VET in sea fishing	Joint opinion	EUROPECHE, COGECA	ETF	12/12/1990	European institutions/ national authorities
Sea transport	Report on the mapping of career paths in the maritime industries	Tool	ECSA	ETF	27/09/2005	European social partners
	Seafarer training and recruitment in Europe	Joint opinion	ECSA	ETF	4/02/2000	European institutions/ national authorities
	<i>Exposé conjoint: les gens de mer de l'Union européenne sont-ils une espèce en voie d'extinction</i>	Joint opinion	ECSA	ETF	27/02/1997	European social partners
	Training: a statement by the joint committee on maritime transport	Joint opinion	ECSA	ETF	14/06/1996	European institutions/ national authorities
Sugar	Joint labour-management declaration on apprenticeship	Joint opinion	CEFS	EFFAT	13/11/2000	European institutions/ national authorities
	<i>Apprentissage dans le secteur sucrier: recommandation paritaire</i>	Process-oriented text	CEFS	EFFAT	1/12/1998	National organisations
Textile and Clothing	<i>Avis commun pour un meilleur accès des femmes à la formation professionnelle</i>	Joint opinion	ECLA (EURATEX), Comitextil	CSE-THC	16/06/1994	European institutions/ national authorities

Table 12. **LLL and VET in work programmes of the European sectoral social dialogue (2000-07)**

Committee	Work programme
Agriculture (1999)	2007: follow up of the agreement on vocational training of 2002 Agripass: approval of the common project (minutes of meetings) 2007: on behalf of the employees' group, Mr Spahn expressed 'considerable surprise at this counter-proposal, which was based on a 39-year-old regulation that had never worked. He added, on the basis of talks with Cedefop experts, that the Europass model would not work in agriculture, which needed its own system' (minutes of meetings) 2007: working party on vocational training: follow-up of the creation of a European directory on farming jobs (minutes of meetings) 2006: follow up of the 2002 agreement on vocational training (minutes of meetings) GEOPA 'explique que son objectif est de parvenir à une aide au remplissage de CV sur le modèle de Europass, développé par le Cedefop' (minutes of meetings – in French only)
Audiovisual (2004)	2007: continue working on training and new technologies (work programme)
Automotive industry (2007)	/
Banking (1999)	2007-08: nothing about training (work programme). 2006: follow-up of the joint declarations on Corporate sectoral restructuring and LLL (work programme)
Catering (2007)	2007-08: agreement on vocational training: annual stocktaking of implementation (work programme) 2007: training manual on hygiene for the contract catering sector. Revision of the European Federation of contract catering organisation (FERCO) training manual (1995) – discussion of a first draft document (minutes of meetings).
Chemical industry (2004)	2007-08: education, training and lifelong learning: European chemical employers' group (ECEG) and European mine chemical and energy workers' federation EMCEF will continue to support the Comenius project 'Cities' started by a research group in 2006. They will follow the relevant initiatives in this area like the European Qualifications Framework, the ECVET, the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes. Both stakeholders discussed around the possibility of defining and certifying core qualifications for typical jobs within the chemical industry (e.g. the operator), possibly in connection with the so-called Europass and a sector specific qualification framework. A follow-up of the recommendations agreed in the report in October 2006 on <i>Skills for chemical businesses – understanding society needs</i> will be undertaken by the Working Group as well (working programme) 2005-06: education/training/LLL: this group will now be formed as a Working Group within the framework of the formalised Social Partner Dialogue. It has the task to analyse the existing information in this area (e.g. reports of previous projects like Trilaterale, activities of Cedefop on sector levels, etc.), taking any previous results of such projects into account and to cooperate with the important institutions in this area in Europe in order to: (1) draft an analysis of the status quo regarding skills, qualifications, vocational (further) training and lifelong learning within the industry (2) facilitate an exchange of information and good practice of the different national systems of education, vocational (further) training and lifelong learning in order to support the further development in these areas. The draft analysis named in (1) should be presented in the form of a report to the second plenary meeting of 2006 (work programme).

Committee	Work programme
Civil aviation (2000)	2007-08: joint project on training and qualifications in the ground handling sector (work programme). 2005-06: air crew: survey and analysis of the scope and contents of existing legal rules governing cabin crew licensing, recruitment and vocational training in the 25 Member States (working programme).
Cleaning (1999)	2007: vocational training (professional skills, service attitude, basic literacy/language skills, etc.) (work programme) 2003: <i>développement et promotion de la formation professionnelle ; projets FORCE et Leonardo alphabétisation</i> (work programme –in French only)
Commerce (1999)	2007-08: in their social dialogue in 2005 and 2006, the social partners started to look for ways to promote youth employment in commerce. This work will continue into 2007, with a view of defining concrete measures to support and develop the employability and employment of young men and women in European commerce. Disadvantaged youth, VET initiatives, the introduction of advanced technologies and the employment potential of SMEs will be given particular attention in this work (work programme) 2007: Spanish social partners efforts in the field of vocational training. The first project was implemented in partnership with social partners from Portugal and Italy. ADAPT programmes. A tripartite foundation for training and employment was set up. 2006: BEQuaWe follow up; presentation of the Austrian system of apprenticeship training; vocational training approach of Metro Group in Germany; <i>École Carrefour</i> (minutes of meetings). 2005: Nothing about training (Work programme).
Construction (1999)	2004-07: vocational training: recognitions of vocational qualifications in the construction industry European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) and European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC) will – in line with the '<i>comparative survey of vocational training of vocational training systems in the European construction industry</i>' (December 2000) – examine the recognition at European level of vocational training qualifications for masons in the construction industry. The outcome of this research will be discussed in 2006. Health and safety rules in the education and training programme. EFBWW and FIEC will examine in 2005-06 the application of the health and safety rules in the education and training programme for construction workers. A comparative study between the actual Member States and the applicant countries will be made (work programme). 2006: working group on vocational training; L. Passot reported on Directorate-General for education and culture proposal to test EQF in the construction sector. The respective secretariats agreed to draw up a common position in response to the Commission's proposal (minutes of meeting)
Electricity (2000)	2004-07: nothing about training (work programme)
Extractive industry (2002)	2006-07: nothing about training (work programme)
Footwear (1999)	2006: training problem with i.a. follow-up of the sixth framework agreement (working programme) 2005: state of play in the main footwear Member States (working programme)

Committee	Work programme
Furniture (2001)	2008: identification of joint issues: impact of training systems on competitiveness; valorise work to attract young persons; upholstered furniture qualification definition and comparison (work programme) 2007: identification of joint issues: impact training systems on competitiveness; offer and demand; <i>valoriser les métiers pour attirer les jeunes</i> (in french in the text). Joint initiatives: training systems analysis and impact on employment and competitiveness; European campaign to valorise jobs (work programme) 2006: comparison of costs, results and benefits of sector training systems in Member States (work programme) 2002: <i>étude sur les coûts et méthodes de formation professionnelles dans les PME; Examen des possibilités de financement : Leonardo da Vinci ou autres</i> (minutes of meetings, in French only) 2001: vocational training (work programme) 2001: <i>Etablissement d'une base de données sur le programme de formation dans le secteur</i> Mr. Lopes (Directorate-General for employment) encourages the social partners to establish relationships with the European Foundation and Cedefop; <i>Centre d'éducation – Coût économique des différents systèmes de formation -Analyse de la formation professionnelle</i>; M. Lopes underlines the importance of Cedefop (Minutes of meeting in French only)
Gas (2006)	2007-08: demographic evolution: impact on competencies and qualifications; professional mobility and recruitment (work programme).
Horeca tourisme (1999)	2007: documentation of skills acquired in education qualification and training – European passport for the hospitality industry (working programme) 2006: documentation of skills acquired in education qualification and training – E-learning – Discussion of a possible qualifications passport for the hospitality industry (working programme). 2006: a qualifications and skills passport for the European hospitality sSector? Mr Couchman (HOTREC) suggested that a special session to discuss a possible European qualifications passport should be organised. At this occasion experts from the various countries where national passport schemes are being developed should be invited to share their experiences and explore ways of setting up a European-wide scheme. Representatives from Cedefop and the Commission could also be invited. The participants raised the following issues: the options paper/card; transitions; compatibility with the Europass. Finally, the sectoral social partners agreed to organise a meeting of the Steering Committee with experts and representatives from Directorate-General EAC and Cedefop to follow-up this issue (minutes of meetings) 2005: documentation of skills acquired in education qualification and training – E-learning (work programme) 2004: documentation of skills acquired in education qualification and training – E-and flex-learning (work programme)
Hospitals (2006)	2006-07: identifying successful training initiatives (work programme).

Committee	Work programme
Inland waterways (1999)	2007-08: nothing on training (work programme) 2007: job profiles and vocational qualifications: whereas the Netherlands' study on job profiles in Europe was still not completed, the abridged version of the final report on the Danube study (<i>Job profiles in inland navigation in the Danube region</i>) is now available. So as not to have to wait an unnecessarily long time for the forthcoming translation of the Netherlands' study, it was agreed to take note of the report as soon as it was available in Dutch. A small joint working group would then examine and evaluate all the available documents in order to prepare a structured discussion by the working party as a whole (minutes of meetings) 2005-06: <i>equivalence des qualifications professionnelles</i> (work programme – in French only) 2006: comparison of occupational qualifications (training requirements): The social partners agreed that half of the next meeting would be spent discussing occupational profiles with a view to establishing uniform requirements. By then, everyone should have had time to read the documents available. These were: a study by the Social and Economic Council in Flanders (http://www.serv.be/), information from the Commission regarding the countries in Eastern Europe and the Dutch study presented on the day of the meeting. It was still necessary to determine jointly what the ultimate objective of the exercise should be: harmonisation or mutual recognition of qualifications. The Commission representative suggested that a proposal for a project should be submitted, where necessary, or that the Working Group should contact Cedefop (minutes of meetings).
Insurance (1999)	2007-08: nothing about training (work programme) 2003: conference about LLL (work programme).
Live performance (1999)	2007: Leonardo da Vinci project (TTT) (work programme) 2003 and following years: Leonardo da Vinci project, Theatre technology training in 2003 (draft work programme) 2000-03: conference on vocational training for theatre technicians (work programme)
Local and regional government (2004)	2006-07: developing skills through training and lifelong learning (guideline n°23), anticipating and managing the consequences of demographic changes, through the maximisation of employment opportunities for young people, women and older workers (guideline n°18) (work programme). 2004-05: nothing about training (work programme)
Maritime transport (1999)	2003: training and recruitment: identifying and building on areas of common ground in the Commission's Communication, including assessment of/liaison with METNET project (draft work programme)
Personal services (hair and beauty) (1999)	2007: set up of European student competitions – realisation of the second educational congress in Italy (work programme).
Postal services (1999)	2007: joint declaration on training and skills development 2006 follow up (work programme)

Committee	Work programme
Private security (1999)	2006: training tool kit on airport security, patrolling and alarm response centres: separate educational toolkits have been developed for the three different profiles of airport security, mobile patrolling and alarm response centres. The content of these toolkits have been presented and described. They contain a different number of modules that could be used easily by everybody who wants to give training in the covered areas. UNI-Europa welcomed the toolkits as a result of many hours good quality work. However, UNI-Europa suggested to further balance the structure and to add a political introduction to the document. It was decided to disseminate the document to the members, to integrate any comments and to adopt the document in the next plenary meeting (minutes of meetings). 2004-05: training handbook: the initial training handbook for guarding has been really successful. Translations into different EU languages, as in Lithuanian, are on the way of achievement. Considering vocational training as a keyelement for the professionalisation of the private security sector, UNI-Europa and CoESS want to publish a specific initial training handbook for risky jobs, especially in airports, where a specific training is required in each country for the security agents (minutes of meetings)
Railways (1999)	2007-08: training : following closely the Railtraining study (Directorate-GeneralEnergy and transport) (work programme). 2003: nothing about training (work programme).
Road transport (1999)	2007-08: nothing about training (possible items for the work programme) 2006: lifelong development of competencies in logistics – joint recommendation on employment and training in logistics (work programme); follow up on joint recommendation on employment and training in logistics (minutes of meetings).
Sea fishing (1999)	2007: mutual recognition of professional certification: presentation of the latest development at EU level by a representative of the Commission and exchange of views (minutes of meetings). 2006: European Network for Vocational Training and Education (Refope): examination of possible projects to be carried out and preparation of requests for EU cofinancing in the framework of the open calls for proposals (work programme).
Shipbuilding (1999)	2007-08: qualification work group: organise an human resources research study and workshop regarding demographic changes (spring 2008) – promoting LLL (work programme). 2007: EQF (minutes of meetings) 2006: topics for human resources workshop – transparency of skills and qualifications – promoting LLL; ageing workforce – EQF (minutes of meetings) 2003: <i>une conférence pourrait aborder plus en détail les questions de qualification, formation professionnelle</i> (work programme – in French only)
Steel (2006)	2006-08: evolution of training needs and tools in the context of remarkable demographic changes (work programme).
Sugar (1999)	2003, 2006-08: nothing about training (work programmes).

Committee	Work programme
Tanning leather (2001)	2007: one-leather training Leonardo da Vinci project (minutes of meetings) 2006: training working group (cfr. decision to follow up as part of the 'improved interrelation' project) (March 2005) (work programme). 2006: EQF – Cedefop – Directorate-General for education and culture (powerpoint presentation) Sectoral training database – Cedefop – 31 October 2006 (Powerpoint presentation) Leonardo da Vinci programme (minutes of meetings). 2003-06: training working group: training tools – cross-european in-tanning fellowship training – leather image (work programme – draft). 2005: setting up of a training working group (cfr. decision to follow up as part of the improved interrelation project (work programme).
Telecoms (1999)	2007: skills and training working group: following preliminary discussions in 2006, the social dialogue committee has recognised the need for ongoing dialogue on skills and training issues. It is proposed that an ad-hoc group will consider tangible steps forward, including, but not limiting to, sectoral responses to European skills and training initiatives and the idea of a common European health and safety passport (work programme) 2004: skills and training: both sides agreed on organising a seminar in Brussels [...] with companies, trade unions, institutions, Cedefop, training providers [...] (minutes of meetings).
Temporary agency work (2000)	2007-08: focus on facilitating access to vocational training – diploma recognition in cross-border assignments – European qualification (work programme) 2005-06: open discussion on LLL (work programme)
Textile clothing (1999)	2007: education and vocational training: possible joint projects to be discussed – general discussion on the continuous adjustment of vocational training and education to improve the strategy for employment (work programme) 2006: to conduct three joint vocational training projects in the European textiles and clothing sector (media pool, observatories, classification of functions) (work programme). 2006: vocational training: follow up the proposal to create a European Observatory; proposals to set-up classifications – follow up (Leonardo da Vinci) media-pool: state of play (minutes of meetings) 2005: <i>finalisation des trois projets conjoints de formation professionnelle (media pool – observatoires – classification des fonctions)</i> (work programme – in French only) 2004: <i>discussions à propos des projets potentiels et existants au sein de Leonardo da Vinci</i> (working programme – in french only).

Committee	Work programme
Woodworking (2000)	2008: training and education – Leonardo da Vinci project (Valiwood and e-Wood) – analysing of the three projects: E-Wood, Valiwood, Dewebas – creation of a working group (Work programme).
	2007: training and education – Leonardo da Vinci project (Valiwood and e-Wood); Directorate-General for Energy and transport survey on training and education needs (follow-up) (work programme).
	2007: calls of proposals under the EQF and social dialogue could be interesting as well as cooperation with Cedefop (minutes of meetings).
	2006: training and education – Leonardo da Vinci project – e-learning – Directorate-General for Energy and transport survey on training (work programme).
	2002: vocational training – LLL and e-learning – Mr Gardiner (Directorate-General for Energy and transport) <i>suggère des contacts avec le Cedefop</i> (Minutes of meetings –in French only).
	2001: Leonardo da Vinci – LLL Innovawood – Eurofortech Swot (minutes of meetings).
	2000: <i>programme d'éducation et de formation dans l'Union européenne échanges: a) education: programmes communautaires pour le secteur; b) formation: préparation d'une étude (Swot); c) groupe de travail: constitution d'un groupe de travail éducation et formation professionnelle</i> (Agenda –in French only).

Note: The date under the identification of the committees indicates the year of its creation.

7. Conclusions: the way forward

Numerous changes have taken place during this decade since the publication of the 'information and discussion document' on 'Cedefop and the social partners' in 1997 was issued. Over the last 10 years, the fields of lifelong learning and social dialogue have undergone various developments that have formally strengthened the position of the social partners within the European sphere. In particular, the so-called 'Copenhagen process' contributes to develop a European cooperation in the field of VET and LLL.

In the meantime new developments have taken place in the European social dialogue. In parallel, the EU has enlarged in 2004 and 2007, which has resulted in the inclusion of industrial relations systems and education and training structures that differ widely. These aspects make increasing the diversity of institutional forms in the European Community.

Thus, many challenges remain when working towards enhanced cooperation principles in VET and lifelong learning within a complex system of multi-level governance where the social partners' involvement in European policies is still far to be considered as a simple 'top-down' process. It leads to several hypotheses that state that social partners' role is constrained by societal specificities, which include the industrial relations framework, as well as education and training structures. In this context, the role to play by governance tools such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) will continue being crucial to support enhanced cooperation in VET in the framework of the Copenhagen process. Wider understanding and more research on European governance process on education and training and the labour market will be more than needed.

Therefore, the approach of the social partners' role in the Copenhagen process may not be seen solely in terms of top-down implementation. On the one hand, there is a need to understand how the social partners themselves approach lifelong learning and vocational training in general, with or without any reference to the Copenhagen process. On the other hand, it is needed to understand how the national-level employer associations' and trade unions' objectives, strategies, as well as needs and requirements, are embedded in their national institutional context.

The foremost hypothesis contrasted in the light of the information collected is that lifelong learning and VET are at a core position on the European social partners' agendas. Furthermore, the transversal analysis of the interviews conducted in the countries, with no specific comparison between countries or between sectors, verifies such assumption: findings clearly show that training, in

general, is a topic that is increasingly becoming an object of social partners' strong interest, concern and action – at all levels- from a cognitive point of view, but also in the practical agenda of collective bargaining and in joint texts.

Further, the trade unions and employer organisations have a large range of common objectives such as to pay more attention to adaptability of company and workers in the context of industrial change; update and reinforce legal and coordination aspects of training; working on methods to improve knowledge on future skills needs and examine and widespread good practices among social partners. Nevertheless, the points of view about lifelong learning and training issues differ in several dimensions, such as the main purpose of training or the degree of expected adaptation of training to specific job situations.

The social partners refer to LLL and VET with a multiplicity of terms and a diversity of forms, ranging from detailed training programmes to broader strategies covering both training and education. The terms 'lifelong learning' or 'vocational education and training' are not widely used by the interviewed social partners. So, according to the responses there is no clear consensus on the definition of lifelong learning as such.

The most recent joint texts on LLL has been examined, along with the social partners' work programmes, to identify the potential connections with the Copenhagen process and to understand the context in which the European social partners could express needs and requirements. Indeed, this analysis illustrated that the European social partners are principal actors in contributing to lifelong learning policies.

In the light of the conducted survey, the four priorities matched by the European cross- industry social partners on the framework of actions for lifelong development of competencies and qualifications have been verified as key drivers for the stakeholders performing on education and training within their national contexts, regardless of whether they are in practice less or more aware on the European policies in the field.

In any case, as far as European policies are concerned, generally the interviewees in the countries would acknowledge to be raise their awareness on European matters of education and training (e.g. Copenhagen process, Education and training 2010 work programme). This would be particularly important at some national and sectoral levels included in the sample. In particular, the interviewed social partners would find it extremely useful to be more informed on developments and research findings of other countries and sectors, to adapt their national and sectoral approaches closer to the European ones to support individuals and companies and facing the challenges for European labour markets. It is important to underline that there is a strong involvement by some respondents who are mainly

active at cross-industry level, coming from countries or sectors where training is more strongly implemented and where it receives much attention.

Thus, it could be assumed that links between the social partners' agenda and the European issues (e.g. Copenhagen priorities), when they exist, result from 'convergence without coordination', from common concerns and challenges, rather than from top-down coordination (Hancké, 2002; Marginson and Sisson, 2004).

In industrial relations terms, the results show two clusters of countries according to the levels how training issues are discussed among both sides of the industry within social dialogue and/or collective bargaining. On one hand, the former Member States (Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy and Sweden) where training is negotiated either at inter-sectoral or at branch level (and in companies, as well). On the other hand, the chosen sample of new Member States (Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania) where training strategies are predominantly developed at company level (at managers' own initiative), with some exceptions at national and sectoral levels.

Some factors explain why collective bargaining on LLL and VET issues (qualitative aspect on the collective bargaining) are not more widespread and/or underdeveloped in the selected countries and sectors. For instance, the collective bargaining structure (impact on where and what is negotiated); the social partners' capacity and strategies (lack of resources to negotiate on training); the socioeconomic challenges (structural changes require to look at training as a tool to meet skill requirements jointly discussed by the social partners) and/or the opportunities for investing in training (availability of specific funds or bodies in charge of training encourage social partners to bargaining on the issue).

Furthermore, as for the awareness of the Copenhagen process and the relationships perceived by the social partners between the European and the domestic agendas in the fields of LLL and VET, the data confirm existence of such clusters, showing a differentiation between former EU-15 Member States and the new ones in terms of degree of information, access to information, and use of information in the domestic agenda.

In addition, a relevant finding is that many national/sectoral social partners have linguistic/communication barriers in understanding and communicating in English (as first option) and/or other European languages. This is a crucial aspect to be taken into account to set up top-down strategies and/or further closer approaches to involve more actively social partners in European issues on education and training, in particular at meso (sectors/territories) and micro levels (sub-sectoral/local).

The examination of sector-specific situations covered by the study regarding European agenda in VET/LLL (chemical industry, telecommunication, post courier, trade, electricity and road transport) reinforces these aspects. As already

mentioned, overall, the interviews show that sectoral social partners at national levels would like to increase their knowledge of European affairs for the sector-level players in general, without any clear differentiation from one branch to another. This, in turn, highlights again the prevalence of the national context over sectoral logics, with no clear cross-border similarities in a given sector across the different countries.

Indeed, the national context, both in terms of institutional training and education framework and in terms of industrial relations, shapes the responses in the sectors in each of the countries. Thus, the sectoral data show again that LLL and VET policies cannot be considered to follow a simple top-down approach from the European institutions to the national States, and from there to the cross-industry level and to the sector players and, finally, to companies. At sector level within the countries, the respondents ask for more information and updated follow-up of the sectoral labour-market changes and training trends, associated with comparability of data across countries and sectors.

These aspects lead to concerns and strategies of sectoral social partners' when coping with learning issues. The sectoral stakeholders are more concerned by industrial transformations, adaptations and/or developments in qualifications in the light of structural changes. The social partners' sectoral approach on training is more centred on vocational training in companies (in particular on continuing vocational training) and with a concern for crucial challenges in terms of qualifications needs: changing market demands, technological change and current restructuring process impose job changes and induce threats on employment.

According to sectoral approach findings, several training needs domains have been perceived of particular interest by the sectoral social partners to set up further sectoral training programmes and/or joint training strategies. For instance, interviewed sectoral social partners mentioned the importance to increase provision of training to re-skill workers to face liberalisations and sectoral -and demographic-shifts/challenges (telecommunications, post courier and electricity sectors); training to improve managerial competences and customer relationships (trade sector); training on new production processes and health and safety (chemical industry); training on technical aspects, road regulations and languages (road transport); certification of professions – electricians (electricity sector).

If it is considered the degree of awareness of sector-level social partners for VET issues and their role in building collective agreements for the sector, there are four types of situations:

- (a) the social partners have not approached VET issues, and there is no collective bargaining in the sector on these issues. Therefore, the social partners do not

play a role in VET issues in the sector. This is the case for instance in the road transport in Lithuania;

- (b) the social partners have a partial interest in VET issues, even where collective bargaining takes place at sector level. This is the case for instance when collective bargaining in the sector focuses mostly on wage issues, such as is the case in electricity in Hungary;
- (c) the social partners are interested in VET issues, but collective bargaining takes place at another level than the sector or concentrates on other aspects. Telecoms in Romania, or the chemical industry in Slovakia, are in this situation;
- (d) the social partners are interested in VET issues and these are included in collective bargaining and agreements that take place at sector level, as is the case for instance in telecoms, postal services and electricity in France. The chemical industry in Germany, electricity in Sweden, trade, the chemical industry and electricity in Italy, also give interesting examples of such a situation.

The interviewees have identified some of these needs and requirements. They are very similar from one country to another, except a stronger need in the new Member States for more information about European processes and for comparative data to be more aware on other realities.

More precisely, on the one hand the social partners express several procedural needs related to the processes organising training policies. To some extent, they all refer to demands for closer relationships between the European processes and the social partners at all levels:

- (a) in general, the interviewed social partners recommended to continue working on adapting the approach more closely to the national or sectoral realities. They mentioned the cross-national coordination of training policies as a way to strengthen the European dimension in the field of training;
- (b) further, the interviewees expressed the need to continue associating the European social partners in processes at EU level. These could play a role to improve the connections between the European policies and the national and sectoral players.
- (c) the social partners are willing to be more aware on European issues and underlined the importance of simple, clear and up-to-date information, which should be concrete, operational and easy-to-use for practitioners (it should also be, if possible, translated in different languages). In addition, they find that exchange of information and experience on working approaches are very useful for them;

- (d) the interviewed social partners would find it very useful to join a proactive action by European institutions, with direct contacts with national and sectoral social partners;
- (e) some of them would find it useful increased visibility of lifelong learning and education and training issues all over Europe to heighten awareness;
- (f) some interviewees also mention the need for funding projects led by the social partners.

On the other hand, a number of needs and requirements formulated by the respondents are of a substantive nature, and directly concern the contents of training policies:

- (a) the social partners would like to work on clarification of the meaning of key concepts. This aspect is in line with activities of the European cross-industry social partners promoting the notion of lifelong learning;
- (b) they express needs for support (exchange of practices) and/or advice in the recognition of qualifications and competences through, for instance, participating in the development of common principles for certification and/or validation of informal learning;
- (c) the majority is confronted with the difficulty to identify and anticipate skills needs, and they are would be willing to support and participate in this field of work;
- (d) the worker mobility induces difficulties for the social partners to cope with, in particular in some countries (e.g. Spain, Romania). The social partners are interested in support to approach this issue and identify the challenges raised for their domestic labour market and in terms of skills and competencies.

Not all these needs expressed by respondents do necessarily correspond to realistic or feasible actions to be developed by European institutions or other bodies. But they could be treated as a matter of discussion among and within social partners' organisations at different levels. However, the points of view expressed in the interviews generally indicate a necessity to adapt the approach to the different national institutional and industrial relations contexts, supported by information and/or actions that are relevant on the daily practice of the social partners. In any case, European institutions can play a supportive role providing a platform for discussing such aspects.

About relationships between the European cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue, and lifelong learning and vocational training, it becomes clear that at European level the cross-industry social partners are widely informed and involved in such issues than they are within the countries. The European organisations are highly active in the field, delivering guidelines and/or joint opinions that intend to

reach their national members, they are foremost players on the development of the Copenhagen process on education and training.

In the sectoral social dialogue committees, the interest for LLL and VET is speedily increasing (observed in particular from 2004 to 2008). Such interest is providing numerous initiatives. The analysis reveals that there is no clear trend in the joint texts, with the number of texts on LLL and VET remaining stable over the years, but such interest is becoming increasingly vivid if we look at their work programmes ⁽¹⁷⁾. How the content of the joint work programmes translates into practice is a question that could be scope of further research and analysis.

In this respect, European sectoral social partners could play an important role as a link to facilitate wider social partners involvement/contributions within the frame of current and future key networks and projects on education and training developed at European level (e.g. skills needs, ECVET, Europass, lifelong guidance, etc.).

It is important to remind that when proposing future strategies it would be essential to consider the particular national specificities and industrial relations (stage of development of the social dialogue on education and training in the former and the new Members States) of European countries to differentiate approaches. In this light, some implications to be addressed to social partners, researchers and other stakeholders are as followings:

- (a) increasing awareness of European processes could be further supported by development of working strategies with European social partners and focussing, in particular, on the potential involvement of the European sectoral social dialogue committees. According to the findings, the role to play by European sectoral social dialogue committees should be perceived as crucial to enhance cooperation in VET and LLL issues among and within social partners' organisations.
- (i) For instance, their involvement in capacity-building programmes with their member organisations can constitute a strength to increase cooperation in the new Member States. Their position in the European sectoral committees potentially offers them a good platform to act as a link between the Copenhagen process and the sector-level players in Member States. The relationships between the European committees and the national players are key for further research in the current development of multi-governance processes in the EU. Further follow up and understanding of the potential contributions of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) as a governance tool for education and training,

⁽¹⁷⁾ To check details and asses developments on education and training on recent years on sectoral social dialogue committees work programmes, you can visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/sectoral_en.htm.

could be a good basis for deeper analysis and research on education policies;

- (b) similarly, the differences between the new and the former Member States indicate that in occasions it would be recommendable to adapt supporting approach to social partners, for instance, by setting up information and dissemination strategies on European issues focusing on practical and/or easy-to use information in the new Member States. On the other hand, more 'sophisticated' actions should be addressed in those countries where the social partners have a long-established tradition in the field of training.
 - (i) In this respect, planning some other exchanges of practices (e.g. peer learning activities) should be planned accurately, balancing and stratifying strategically participation of relevant players within both referred clusters to create smooth environments for a clear win-win situations.
 - (ii) In addition, the creation of social partners networks on relevant issues and/or innovative partnerships and/or collection of systematic information about social partners achievements in VET/LLL should be a continuous matter of reflection to support the social partners in the field of education and training. In this regard, further understanding (supported by research and reporting) on the potential role of learning partnerships, in particular focusing on sectoral changes/restructuring, should be a matter of reflection in the medium-term;
- (c) a crucial aspect to be further explored, developed and debated are the future implications of education and training in the frame of the industrial relations. The potential role of the social dialogue and its current and future influence on the collective bargaining to promote training provision, in particular at sectoral and work place levels, should constitute a matter of deeper analysis and discussion. In this particular area, exploring content and impact of training clauses at national and sectoral levels would be an information gap to be filled. In addition, the important role to play by unions should be engaged in discussion within employees' organisations ⁽¹⁸⁾.
 - (i) In addition, the value employers and employees attach to training regarding employability and competitiveness should be a dimension to be deeper explored. The follow up on the role of the social partners in implementing the European tools on education and training (e.g. EQF, ECVET, Europass) could have implications at medium-term for the labour relations, for instance, on recognition of learning outcomes at work places and possible impact on professional classifications;

⁽¹⁸⁾ For a wider perspective on this aspect see Stuart and Robinson (2007).

- (d) these aspects are linked to current debates on flexicurity pathways and the place occupied within this frame by skills policies to improve working conditions. The follow up of the social partners involvement and the exploration of sectoral and company strategies regarding employment security and functional flexibility of workers, under the umbrella of national labour-market policies, should be further developed by researchers and practitioners to gain better understanding on the current challenges of EU labour markets;
- (e) another important aspect to be improved is related to statistical tools. Indeed, indicators to measure social dialogue dynamics are still underdeveloped. The development of projects on how measuring qualitative aspects of collective bargaining, such as education and training issues, should be acknowledged as a challenge by scientific and experts communities. The cooperation between relevant institutions in the field of social dialogue and lifelong learning to develop such projects should be a matter of further attention, reflection and discussion;
- (f) the publication also shows that adult learners, regardless on whether they are considered 'risk groups', are in the centre of concerns by the social partners when they negotiate provision of training. In particular, in the light of the sectoral results continuing vocational training has been verified as the 'natural' area on which major social partners' contributions and performances should be expected.
 - (i) Here the social partners could play a potential role by further developing and transferring sectoral training policies to facilitate higher access of adult learners to learn, in the context of sectoral shifts and new/future skills and occupational requirements. The sectoral training funds experiences in the former Member States are an example of such possible policies to be 'transferred' and implemented by the new Member States and candidate countries;
- (g) concluding, the development of the social dialogue in LLL appears as a clear topic to be more developed and explored. There would be a lot of room to increase cooperation and enhance coordination with those organisations which participated on the strategy framework of actions for lifelong development of competences and qualifications (plus those affiliated at ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP and UEAPME in the new Member States and in the candidate countries). For instance, following up social dialogue developments on detection of future skills needs or recognising non formal/informal learning outcomes on continuing training would be clear topics to set up working strategies with the social partners.

- (i) In the light of information gaps of the social partners on European issues, underdevelopment of bargaining on education and training issues and/or linguistic barriers (improvement of European languages, particularly English), some working strategies would be needed. For instance, a clear strategy to develop would be to set up training actions accompanied by internal debates/discussions within stakeholders' organisations. This could be supportive to improve performance of the stakeholders on the European context of VET and LLL.
- (ii) In this respect, there is key role to play by those European institutions working in the field. All the aspects mentioned above should be perceived as a clear opportunity to set up further cooperation and involvement strategies based on proactive approaches with the social partners at different levels.

Finally, it is important to underline that all these findings confirm that Cedefop is providing a distinctive added value through its services and by cooperating actively with the social partners within the frame of the Copenhagen process. It will continue following principles acknowledged on the Bordeaux Communiqué.

List of abbreviations

CEEP	European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
IST	Institut des Sciences du Travail
LLL	lifelong learning
UCL	Catholic University of Louvain
UEAPME	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UNICE	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe
VET	vocational education and training

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ANNEX 1

Interview guide

Respondent identification:

Name of the respondent:

Name and type of organisation:

Level of action of the organisation: European, national, sectoral, territorial or local:

Status of the respondent in its organisation:

The respondent will remain anonymous. All interviews will be synthesised with no identification of the specifics respondents.

Social partners' priorities in lifelong learning

The objective of these questions is to get information on the social partners' degree of awareness and interest in lifelong learning and VET.

Lifelong learning is defined as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective' (EC, 2001))

'Lifelong learning is therefore about:

- acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post-retirement. It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future,
 - valuing all forms of learning, including: formal learning, such as a degree course followed at university; non-formal learning, such as vocational skills acquired at the workplace; and informal learning, such as inter-generational learning, for example where parents learn to use ICT through their children, or learning how to play an instrument together with friends'
- (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/life/what_isll_en.html).

1. Is lifelong learning and/or VET on the agenda of your organisation?
 - Yes (-> go to question 2)
 - No (-> go to question 4)
2. If yes, can you describe the objectives and content of your organisation's agenda in lifelong learning and/or VET?
 - What are the topics included? (explain)
 - What are the objectives?
 - Are lifelong learning and/or vocational training issues important for your organisation? Why?/Why not?
 - What are the trends in this matter over the last five years?

3. Is lifelong learning and/or VET discussed through collective bargaining with the employers/trade unions?
 - If yes, can you describe the form that these discussions take:
 - What are the issues discussed?
 - When did they start? What is the calendar?
 - Are these discussions easy or difficult? Why?
 - What kind of difficulties do you meet during these discussions with the other part?
 - What are the trends in these discussions over the last five years?
 - Do these discussions result in joint texts?
 - Yes/no
 - If yes,
 - What types of texts (recommendations, opinions, agreements?)
 - If there are agreements on lifelong learning and/or vocational training:
 - At what level (cross-industry, sector, territorial/local, company?)
 - What is their content? (explain)
 - What are their outcomes and results? (explain)
 - Do you meet any difficulties to reach an agreement with the other part of the industry on these matters
 - If no, why? (explain)
4. If no (to question 1),
 - What are the priorities in your agenda?
 - What topics do you discuss with the employers/trade unions?
 - Did you ever consider including lifelong learning or vocational training in the agenda? Why? Why not?

Links with other levels of industrial relations

The objective of these questions is to get information on the place of LLL and VET at the different levels of industrial relations systems and on the relationships between levels.

5. Are lifelong learning issues and/or VET issues present in the discussions between employers and trade unions at other levels?
 - Cross-industry
 - Sector
 - Territorial/ local
 - Company

6. Are there links between the debates and (if any) negotiations on lifelong learning and/or VET at your level and other levels of industrial relations
 - If yes, which one(s) and why?
 - If no, why?
 - In this case, which are the obstacles hindering any link between your organisation and other levels of industrial relations?

Links with public authorities

The objective of these questions is to get information on the relationships between the public authorities and social partners in lifelong learning and VET issues
Public authorities = for interviews at national level, the state, territorial and local authorities; for interviews at European level, the European Commission and Council

7. What is the role playing by public authorities in lifelong learning and/or in VET?
8. Is there any link between your organisation and the public authorities on lifelong learning and/or VET?
 - If yes, explain?
 - If no, why?
9. Do you have any expectations towards the public authorities with regard to lifelong learning and/or vocational training?
 - If yes, why and what are they?
 - If no, why?

Links between national and European levels

The objective of these questions is to get information on the relationships (if any) between the processes at European level, and particularly the Copenhagen process, and the processes in the national contexts.
On November 2002, the ministers of education of the European countries, the Commission and the European social partners adopted the Copenhagen declaration on enhanced European cooperation in VET (EC, 2002).
The declaration gave a mandate to develop concrete actions to improve the effectiveness, quality and attractiveness of VET and mentions four priorities to follow:

- strengthening the European dimension in VET;
- developing transparency, information and guidance;
- developing a recognition of competences and qualifications;
- promoting cooperation in quality assurance.

The Maastricht communiqué (EC, 2004;) updated the declaration and set out new priorities and strategies. The Helsinki Communiqué (EC, 2006a) reviewed the priorities set in the Copenhagen declaration with four overarching objectives:

- improving the attractiveness and quality of VET;
- developing and implementing common tools for VET;
- strengthening mutual learning;
- taking all stakeholders on board.

10. Have the European processes, and specifically the Copenhagen process, any influence on your agenda?
 - If yes, explain
 - If no, why?
11. Have the European processes, and specifically the Copenhagen process, any influence on your discussions and negotiations?
 - If yes, explain
 - If no, why?
12. Are there relationships between European processes and national debates and negotiations on lifelong learning and/or VET?
13. Has your organisation any expectations or needs towards the European institutions in the field of lifelong learning and/or VET and according to these priorities?
 - Strengthening the European dimension in VET
 - Developing transparency, information and guidance
 - Developing a recognition of competences and qualifications
 - Promoting cooperation in quality assurance
 - If yes, explain
 - If no, why?

Cedefop's role

The objective of these questions is to get information on specific needs or requirements that social partners may address to the European institutions in the context of the Copenhagen process.

14. Has your organisation any expectations or needs regarding the role of the European institutions in lifelong learning and/or VET?
15. Does your organisation express any particular needs towards, such for instance, Cedefop?
 - In general
 - In the field of the identification and the anticipation of skills needs?
 - In the field of the recognition of competences and qualifications?
 - In the field of support in lifelong learning and/or VET?
 - In terms of mobilising financial resources
 - In terms of information and communication
 - in terms of support to SME's, groups at risk in labour market and support in the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the European credit system for VET (ECVET);
 - In strengthening the European dimension in VET;

- In developing transparency, information and guidance
 - In promoting cooperation in quality assurance
16. Perspectives and final questions
 17. How do you see the role of your organisation with regard to lifelong learning and VET in the next 3 to 5 years?
 18. Are there needs and requirements that your organisation could address to the European institutions in the next 3 to 5 years?
 19. Do you have any other comment?



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