Abstract: In the last decade there has been a permanent preoccupation for the necessity of quality improvement in educational and professional training systems (1999), by information exchange and experience, by promoting dialogue and testing and particularly through European education and training programmes. Since 1995, the Leonardo Da Vinci programme has supported a large number of trans-national projects and cooperation initiatives. The European Forum for Quality in education and professional training was created in 2000, in order to facilitate information and experience exchange, to stimulate debates. The Forum was the first cooperation platform technically structured, for the European Commission, member states and social partners, involved in various aspects related to education and professional training quality. A fundamental step was made through the European Council resolution and the European Ministers Declaration for Education and Professional Training, related to promoting European cooperation in education and professional training.

1. Actual Requests on Assuring Qualitative Training Services at European and International Level

The European Council, reassembled at Barcelona in March 2002 decided to introduce some instruments to assure diplomas and qualifications transparency, by using promotion actions similar to ones organized in the case of the “Bologna process” in education, but adapted to professional training. With this occasion, a set of priority activities were established to assure the creation of a unique European framework, namely:

- qualifications and competences transparency;
- credit transfer system in professional training;
- assuring professional training quality.

These priorities refer to the establishment of basic conditions to increase mobility and to facilitate access to lifelong learning. The principles which support cooperation development in education and professional training refer to following aspects:

- By 2010, the cooperation will seek to have accomplished the objectives and the action plan established in education and professional training field at European level;
- Measure plans about reaching strategic objectives are voluntary, being established mainly when the cooperation starts;
- Initiatives are focused on covering citizens and users organizations requests;
- EU member states, European Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and social partners will get involved in the cooperation. The Copenhagen Declaration establishes

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1 European Council Resolution 2000 / C 8/04, „Into the new millenium: developing new working procedures for European cooperation in the field of education and training”, Brussels, 1999;
3 Adopted in Copenhagen, 29 – 30.11.2002;
4 European Council Document no.5680/02, 04.02.2002;
the policy about assuring quality in the education and professional training field;

A technical group for assuring quality in education and professional training was created at the General Directory for Education and Culture within the European Commission, to manage implementation of established priorities at the Copenhagen Declaration. Representatives of member states, candidate states, EFTA-EEA countries and social partners are part of this group. The mandate of this technical group covers the following activities:

- Examination of national and international standards and regulations, application degree, strengths and weaknesses about their utilization;
- Identification of common key criteria for quality improvement at the European level;
- Development of a limited set of quality indicators at EFP systems level, based on existing practices at national levels;
- Operational approach based on common key criteria and a set of quality indicators, through establishment of clear methods, auto-evaluation practical instruments, guides and verification lists for assuring quality;
- Elaboration of framework proposals for cooperation in order to develop common activities among countries, on various subjects, for promoting volunteering and good practices exchange which exist at national levels. This includes supervising of previously made operational approach;
- Systematic reporting of results, periodic information of member states and major parts are involved in this demarche.

Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) represents a reference framework, to assure and develop quality in education and professional training. This model is built on basic principles of most relevant models of assuring quality, existing nowadays. It can be considered a transversal instrument, which assists policy-makers and patricians to identify a functioning method for quality assuring models, aspects of a training process which requires modifications and decision making for their improvement, based on quantitative and qualitative references. This common European framework allows creation of a database with existing good practices at the EU member states level. The European framework for assuring quality can be used at national system level, but also at education and professional training provider level, allowing evaluation of training efficiency.

From this perspective, an important attention is given to professional training “outputs” and “results” evaluation, as:

- increasing workforce occupancy degree;
- improvement of jobs offer and demand relation;
- promoting access to lifelong learning, especially for the disadvantaged.

Progresses due to Common Quality Assurance Framework usage are efficiency, transparency and mutual confidence in education and professional training systems, at national and European level. Assuring and improvement of quality are continuous processes. The same thing can be said about the Common Quality Assurance Framework, which should be revised periodically, according to new contexts, different approaches of assuring quality, without losing from its generality and independence. This framework can permanently be improved through feedback, made according to common references (quality criteria and indicators).

2. Operating European Principles on Assuring Qualitative Training

The European Common Quality Assurance Framework has a series of characteristics, which enable its usability on a large scale. It is based on the EU member states experience and, with the consent of working group participants on quality assurance field, the key zones and criteria for assuring and improving quality were identified. This general framework has a simple approach for a complex problem; it does not prescribe solutions, but identifies common questions, that may have

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more than one possible answer which make quality criteria that are related to the main steps issued by EFQM and ISO. The European Common Quality Assurance Framework includes:

- a model, which allows planning, implementation, evaluation and system analysing;
- this model can be used at national system level, but also at training provider level. The model includes four stages: planning, implementation, evaluation and analyse;
- a methodology for evaluation and system analysis;
- auto-evaluation and external supervising are credited with a special importance;
- the European common framework includes the decisions referring to the contribution of the parts involved in the processes, design of evaluation tools, planning, implementation and feedback procedures and rationalizing decisions for the stages in order to create a unified system. It has been considered that auto-evaluation is a relevant methodology for quality assurance, an auto-evaluation guide being elaborated for this reason, which includes:
  - a supervising system, which is established according to the considered level (national or regional) and can be extended on voluntary basis, throughout a detailed analysis, at European level; EU member states must establish the most appropriate system for systems supervising, at national level and at training provider level, which should work based on two key principles: external supervising and feedback. This supervising activity is complementary with auto-evaluation made of training providers;
  - measuring instruments: a set of reference indicators, in order to let the member states supervise and evaluate their own systems, at national and regional level.

Establishing a new common measurement system is useful, in order to be able to compare different training providers, including national quality assurance systems. In order to have this, some common reference indicators are needed, which can be real verifying and alert instruments in the educational and professional process at national level. The logic of the European common quality assurance framework is built on basic principles of the most relevant existing models of quality assurance. This quality assurance framework is extremely useful, especially for the countries where the quality assurance does not have a minimum level of formal development. It is a systemic framework to which policies can be issued and it can be a reference for quality assuring systems. The common framework for assuring quality to education and professional training system, at the European level is shown in Figure no.1

![European Common Quality Assurance Framework](image_url)

Fig.1 European Common Quality Assurance Framework for education and professional training systems, at European level (Source: European Commission, Technical Group "Quality in VET", “Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for VET in Europe, 24.06.2004)
3. European Programmes for Trans-national Cooperation on Quality Professional Training Field

The existence of European networks of information and cooperation has a key role in good practices exchange and in dissemination of activity results at the European Commission level regarding assuring quality education and professional training. Adequate functioning of these networks involves supervising and adequate tracking to assure the accomplishment of its mission to make these networks and the pre-established requirements, as to benefit of the advantages of the access to public information databases. The EU encourages this networks functioning by launching some European financing programmes, among which we can mention the Leonardo Da Vinci programme. In this programme, various projects are operating in order to accomplish the Measures program of European Commission, projects which allow network development and trans-national cooperation. One of the components had as a theme “Quality in education and professional training”.

Generally, the Leonardo Da Vinci programme intended to elaborate projects which seek implementation of development measures on human resources field, by taking into consideration:

- Mobility, by organizing trans-national projects of human resources managers exchange from the economic sector and managers from the professional training field, by organizing study visits for training respondents with professional training on themes suggested by the EU Commission;
- Pilot projects, to assure the support of transfer and development of innovation and quality in professional training;
- Linguistic competences, as a support in promoting cultural and linguistic competences in professional training, including also linguistic audits;
- Trans-national networks, as a support for activities which require participation of many partners from EU member states, at regional or sector level, from public or private area;
- Reference materials, for activities of elaboration, actualization and dissemination of informative materials;
- Actions correlated with other community programmes.

With all the special contribution for development of activities through cooperation, the Leonardo Da Vinci programme does not mainly seek to cover requisitions of structured and durable institutional cooperation, which should promote political commitments regarding supervision, tracking and transfer of results. Therefore, it has appeared the urgent need to develop structured networks, based on voluntary work, in order to promote practical programmes of work which refer to methods and procedures for assuring quality, standards, norms and criteria (external providers credential, standardization results) and auto-evaluation of training providers. These networks should allow the association between:

- Ministerial representatives, social partners and authorities from various countries, which are responsible for the education and professional training quality, in order to organize exchange of good practices examples and mutual learning from these references, for supervising and evaluation of cooperation status;
- National and sector agencies, responsible for assuring quality in various contexts and which wish to contribute to Common quality assuring framework (CQAF) agreed at European level.

In accordance with the European Community, there were created more “virtual communities” at the ECPFTD level, in order to promote dialogue and to allow information exchange about Copenhagen Declaration (2002). Initially, these communities focused on promoting transparency, quality, credits transfer and consulting. In the end, ECPFTD founded 21 virtual communities, with a total number of 5500 members, reachable through “European Training Village”\(^7\). Among these communities there are some focused on: consulting for lifelong learning, quality assurance for education and professional learning, transferable credit system, formal and informal training, e-learning, European framework for qualification assimilation, trainers’ training. The virtual community

\(^7\) [http://communities.trainingvillage.gr](http://communities.trainingvillage.gr)
for assuring quality in education and professional training is important as an internal instrument of work, but also as a method of dissemination of information and accumulated experience in managing various projects. Hereby transparency is assured to various demarches and accomplishments in the field covered by this community. The subjects for actual discussion are referring to development and adoption of standards and quality regulations, criteria and education and professional training quality indicators. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) was founded in 1975, as a European agency for promoting and developing professional training, actually being a reference European centre in this field, by offering to European partners various scientific and technical knowledge. Its mission is to promote lifelong learning at European level, by supplying information, analyses of educational and professional training systems and policies, through research and practice. CEDEFOP was one of the initiators of the approach on assuring quality for professional training, nowadays being the leader in applicative research activities for implementing CQAF at national and training providers’ level. European training Village (ETV)\(^8\) is an interactive platform for cooperation between policy makers, social partners, researchers, trainees; all those interested in education and professional training. Made in 1998, ETC provides updated information about this field. The website is structured on six main areas: news, information resources, projects and networks, forum, youth and ETV, external networks. It also allows the access to the knowledge management system of CEDEFOP, which contains information from professional training area, structured in 11 main subjects, in which assuring quality is also included. European Training Foundation (ETF)\(^9\) assists partner states in developing and implementing quality to educational and professional training. ETV assures expertise and consulting for competences and personal knowledge development, for improving life conditions, for an active citizenship and for a democratic society. ETF acts in the name of the European Commission and other European public institutions, having a partner network in member states, candidate countries, and Mediterranean region. Among ETV activities we can mention: progress and priorities evaluation regarding reform in education and professional training at member states level; projects designing, supervising and evaluating at European Commission request; constructing the modernization capacity for education and professional training in partner states; active contribution at international debates about promoting innovation in transition countries; technical assistance for Tempus programme progress. The European Commission decided to create the Internet portal PLOTEUS\(^{10}\), which offers information about learning opportunities in Europe. This was a part of the answer given to European Council requests (Lisbon -2000 and Stockholm –2001) according to it, member states should establish a wide European service to offer information about jobs offers and learning opportunities. In April 2003, the Commission initiated R3L which connects 120 learning regions, in the perspective of know-how exchange and development of lifelong learning at regional level. PLOTEUS intends to help students and those who are looking for a job, workers, parents, carrier consultants and professors to find information about studying in Europe. In PLOTEUS all relevant information about lifelong learning in Europe can be found.

**References:**

2. Council of Europe Document nr.5680/02, 04.02.2002
7. www.trainingvillage.gr
8. www.etf.eu.int

\(^8\) www.trainingvillage.gr\n\(^9\) www.etf.eu.int\n\(^{10}\) http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal